SUCH A THING DOES NOT HAPPEN IN ISRAEL:

READING 2 SAMUEL 13 AS HORROR

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of

Claremont School of Theology

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Leland Merritt

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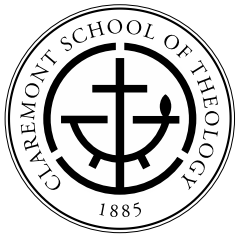

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has been presented to and accepted by

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Abstract

Such a Thing Does Not Happen in Israel: Reading 2 Samuel 13 as Horror

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The events of 2 Samuel 13 are horrifying. The narrative portrays malicious scheming, incest, rape, abandonment, and fratricide. The story elicits anger and disgust in its audience. Phyllis Trible lists this passage among her "Texts of Terror," describing Tamar's fate as "unrelieved suffering." Craig Morrison in his commentary on 2 Samuel, cites the rape of Tamar as "unbearable to read." They depict the feeling of terror that comes over the audience while reading the text. There is no doubt that the story is horrifying. It seems that a horror lens would be a natural approach to interpreting this passage, yet, at this time, no one has approached 2 Samuel 13 through horror theory. Scholarship has focused on Tamar and what she might represent to ancient Israel or how the passage reflects the leadership of King David. Some scholars have chosen to focus on the horrible treatment of women in the passage and what the passage might imply about the status of women in ancient Israel. I am proposing that a look at 2 Samuel 13 with an eye to horror offers deeper insights into ancient Israel's own fears of a rape culture perpetuated by the royal household.

This dissertation will offer a new view of understanding 2 Samuel 13, considering our own approaches towards contemporary horror media. I argue that 2 Samuel 13 should be understood as a horror story and thus contains many tropes, literary devices, and messages that are common in the horror genre. This is not to say that the author of 2 Samuel 13 was aware of what tropes and devices make up horror stories, nor do I wish to apply anachronistic terms to the passage. However, treating the text as a horror story and using the same methodology that horror scholars may use when analyzing a modern text shines new light on the meaning of the text. The

goal of this study is not to prove that 2 Samuel 13 is horror, but to see what insights reading the texts as if it is horror brings the reader. This requires a keen understanding of how horror works and how horror writers use horror to accomplish their own goals. The purpose of this study is to learn what horror can teach us about 2 Samuel 13.

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This dissertation is the result of years of contemplation, conversations, and thousands of hours of watching horror movies. It would not be possible without the encouragement and support of my committee. My advisor, Dr. Jon Berquist, upon hearing that I was interested in horror studies as an approach to the Hebrew Bible told me that he did not tend to watch horror movies but would try to help me as much as he could. Dr. Berquist has more than answered that call and has been an advocate every step of the way. I have learned that the most important factor in surviving a doctoral program is an advisor who believes in you. I am blessed to have that in Dr. Berquist.

The beginning of my research traces back to my first week at Claremont School of Theology during Dr. Tammi Schneider's "Women in the Book of Genesis" Seminar. By chance of fate, I was one of the last to choose my character and chose Dinah. I had no idea what to do with Genesis 34 until that October when I happened to watch *The Last House on the Left* for a Halloween marathon I was doing for fun. I noticed the similarities between the stories and asked Dr. Schneider if she would be okay with me comparing Genesis 34 to a variety of rape-and-revenge exploitation films from the 70s. She said she hated horror movies but to go ahead and try it. Since then, Dr. Schneider has been a fount of encouragement.

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Chapter 1: History of Scholarship

2 Samuel 13 finds itself as a bridge between two major sections of the Davidic narrative. The prophet Nathan has condemned David for stealing Bathsheba and murdering her husband, Uriah. Nathan prophesied that the sword will never depart from the house of David (2 Sam. 13:10). On the other side of 2 Samuel 13, we see David's son, Absalom, in open rebellion against his father's throne. Second Samuel 13 is the beginning of the so-called "Succession Narrative."[1] The text introduces the readers to three of David's children: Amnon, Absalom, and Tamar. Amnon is deeply infatuated with Tamar, so much that he makes himself sick. With the advice of his shrewd cousin, Jonadab, Amnon tricks David into sending Tamar into Amnon's house where he seizes her and rapes her. While ancient Israelite law dictates that Amnon must marry Tamar, Amnon begins to hate the sight of her (Deut. 22:28-29). Instead, he throws her out. Tamar reacts by screaming and tearing her clothes. Absalom discovers her and realizes what has happened. He tells her to be quiet and not to take it to heart. Absalom then waits two years, before he concocts a plan to intoxicate Amnon at a sheep-shearing festival and have his servants kill him. David hears what has happened to Amnon and mourns the death of his son while Absalom flees to Geshur.

Phyllis Trible describes Tamar's fate in 2 Sam 13 as "unrelieved suffering."[2] The text is horrifying to read. It elicits emotions of fear, disgust, and horror in the reader. It is a narrative full of rape, incest, monsters, horror, and bloodshed. One may expect to find it more at home in a movie theater than in a Sunday school classroom. Still, it is a part of the Hebrew Bible as horrifying as it. Yet no one has applied a horror lens to interpreting 2 Sam 13. This dissertation

[1] Leonhard Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David*, trans. Michael D. Rutter and D. M. Gunn (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

[2] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, (Fortress Press, 1984), 37.

uses the scholarship and methodologies that horror scholars use while evaluating a horror story to interpret 2 Sam 13. By using horror studies as a lens, I will reveal that 2 Sam 13 is a critique against the rape culture that existed in ancient Israel.

After the introductory chapter which will include a brief history of scholarship on 2 Samuel, chapter 2 will engage with the history of Horror studies and how different psychoanalytic and sociological approaches work to build a coherent horror methodology. This study begins with Sigmund Freud's *The Uncanny* (1919). Freud's understanding of the *unheimlich* explores the uneasy feeling of uncertainty one feels when encountering a surface that is normal but something is hidden underneath. Building off of Freud and Lacan, Julia Kristeva's understanding of the abject is a useful way to understanding the boundary lines between what is acceptable by a society and what is rejected by society.[3] This lays the foundations for the typology of monsters. We can understand monsters to be that which is rejected by society. Robin Wood's studies on the American horror film engage with horror as things that are kept in the shadows of society.[4] Wood coined the term "return of the repressed." For Wood, the thing that frightens American culture the most is the otherness in race, gender, class, culture, nationality, and sexual orientation. These others are outside the boundaries of the American homogenous and thus they are monsters. Horror has a way of showing the audience exactly who are the culture's monsters. Therefore, horror is an ideal lens to examine what society fears the most.

The last few years has seen an increase in horror and Biblical scholarship, beginning with Amy Kalmanofsky's *Terror All Around: Horror, Monsters, and Theology in the Book of*

[3] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, European Perspectives (Columbia University Press, 1982).

[4] Robin Wood, *Robin Wood on the Horror Film: Collected Essays and Reviews* (Wayne State University Press, 2018).

Jeremiah.[5] In her study, Kalmanofsky examines how Jeremiah uses horror to elicit emotional responses from the audience. Kalmanofsky builds her argument off of Noel Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror*, which argues that horror elicits feelings of fear and disgust.[6]

Brandon Grafius has written extensively on horror and the Hebrew Bible laying a groundwork for which this dissertation is built. Grafius is not concerned with proving any particular texts are horror but with placing these texts in conversation with modern horror may shine new insights on the texts. Grafius is concerned with the more violent and blood-filled texts of the Hebrew Bible. But rather than dismissing them as violent texts; he uses horror to engage the texts and see what the fears and anxieties of ancient Israel may have been to produce such a text. In the same way that Robin Wood postulates that American horror films reveal the fears and anxieties of America; Grafius argues the same can be said of ancient Israel. This is the main methodology of this dissertation. By placing 2 Sam 13 in conversation with horror studies, we can reveal the fear and anxieties that ancient Israel had surrounding rape and the status of women in a culture rape culture.

Chapters 3-5 will examine different portions of 2 Sam 13. Chapter 3 will examine the first 11 versus in which the audience is introduced to Amnon, Absalom, Jonadab, and Tamar. Amnon and Jonadab concoct a plan to have Amnon pretend to be sick. David will then send Tamar to Amnon's house in order to take care of her. The scene is shown through the eyes of Amnon, mirroring the I-perspective of many monster movies. The tension builds until Amnon finally seizes Tamar in verse 11.

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[5] Amy Kalmanofsky, *Terror All Around: Horror, Monsters, and Theology in the Book of Jeremiah* (T&T Clark International, 2008).

[6] Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (Routledge, 2003), 14.

Chapter 4 will continue the analysis of 2 Sam 13 by focusing on vs. 12-22. In these verses, Tamar pleads with Amnon not to rape her. She argues that such a thing does not happen in Israel and that doing this this would make him a monster. It is not immediately clear whether the thing if this rape is incest or not. Some scholars suggest that the text is not concerned with he incestual implications of the rape. However, I argue that the characters are well aware of their familial connection and the taboo nature of the violence. Amnon ignores Tamar's argument and rapes her. I then use Kristeva's understanding of the abject to interpret the Tamar's argument. Tamar is using terminology that would depict Amnon as a monster in the perspective of ancient Israel. Despite this, we see Tamar becoming abject once she is banished from Amnon's house, screaming and tearing her clothes. I discuss the mirroring effect in horror and the history of women screaming in horror.

Chapter 5 picks up with the remainder of 2 Samuel 13. The narrative picks up two years later with Amnon suffering zero consequences for his rape of Tamar. Absalom invites David and Amnon to attend a sheep shearing festival in Baal-Hazor. David refuses the invitation, but Amnon accepts. Once Amnon is intoxicated at the festival, Absalom orders his servants to kill Amnon. The news of Amnon's death reaches David and David mourns the death of his son. In the meantime, Absalom flees to Geshur. This chapter examines the story in light of rape-and-revenge narratives in horror. The rape-and-revenge narrative is precisely what its name implies. It is a story where one character is raped and some sort of revenge is enacted on behalf of the victim, either by the victim or the victim's loved one. However, I will adopt Barbara Creed's definition of rape-and-revolt stories that she proposes in her book *Return of the Monstrous-Feminine.*[7] Creed's new definition argues that these rape-and-revolt stories go further than

[7] Barbara Creed, *Return of the Monstrous-Feminine: Feminist New Wave Cinema* (Routledge, 2022), 51-67.

avenging the rape on the perpetrator. They instead attack the entire system that upholds rape culture. I argue that 2 Sam 13 is a rape-and-revolt story that blames David just as much as it demonizes Amnon, ultimately culminating in Absalom revolting against his father's throne.

Approaches to Horror

The film opens with a close-up shot focused on a man's closed eyelid. The eyelid flickers for a moment before opening wide, revealing a large, round, blue eyeball. The music thuds. The camera cuts to a wide shot of a rundown part of London. A woman dressed in sultry attire stands on the street corner. She is not out of place but in her element. A man in a brown trench coat approaches her. Before she notices him, the camera reveals to the audience that the man is holding a camera beneath his trench coat, hidden from view. The rest of the scene takes place from the perspective of this hidden camera. As the man advances, the woman begins to show off her figure, marketing herself to a potential buyer. "It'll be 2 quid," the woman states before walking down an alley into a stairway. The man follows. The camera keeps its gaze focused on the woman as she struts down the street and up a flight of stairs into a bedroom apartment.

The woman, without saying a word, begins to disrobe as if she has done this hundreds of times before. The scene is full of the male gaze, yet it is not sensual. The scene is grimy and passionless. It feels dirty. The audience feels as if they are watching something they should not be seeing. The camera shifts down as the man fiddles with his camera. (We will learn later that the man has unsheathed a knife from the end of his tripod. Further, he has brought out a light and a mirror. The killer wants his victims to see their own screams as they die.) The woman looks towards the man as a spotlight shine on her. Her face turns from perplexed to concerned to

outright terror as the man approaches her. The camera focuses on her face, centering the shot on her scream.[8]

Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960) tells the story of Mark Lewis, a shy cinematographer who is never seen without his camera. He works as a focus puller at a local studio while also working part-time taking pornographic pictures in the back apartment of a local newsstand. His downstairs neighbor, Helen, takes a liking to Mark, striking up a relationship with him. Mark softens and reveals to her videos that his cruel father recorded while Mark was a child. The films give proof that Mark's father abused him through terrifying psychological experiments. Unbeknownst to Helen, Mark is the serial killer that the audience met in the opening scene of the movie. The audience is left helpless as we watch the innocent Helen get closer and closer to the monster as she deepens her relationship with the very danger that threatens her life.

Powell tells his story not just through conventional film techniques but also uses the perspective of the camera to carry his message. At key moments throughout the film, Powell forces the audience to see the murders through the eyes of the killer. We witness the horror through Mark's camera lens. It is through this technique that we become complicit in Mark's horrific crimes. Carol Clover refers to *Peeping Tom* as a "meta film" in her essay on the eye in horror films. "It is a horror meta film: a film that has as its task to expose the psychodynamics of specularity and fear."[9] Powell is putting the audience in the position of the monster, adding blame to the audience. For is it not the audience that paid money to see the film? Thus, begging

[8] "Opening Scene," *Peeping Tom*, directed by Michael Powell (Anglo-Amalgamated Film Distributers, 1960), streaming on Tubi.

[9] Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton University Press, 1992), 169.

the question, "why would anyone want to tell these stories and who in their right mind would want to watch them?"

The question of who would possibly want to hear these tales of blood, monsters, and horror is not just for the movie review column of your local newspaper. It is in fact a criticism of some of the more ignored parts of the Hebrew Bible. These texts that do not fit in a nice homely or leave an encouraging message for a bumper sticker. Even Biblical scholars have gone out of their way to avoid them. In the introduction to her book *Texts After Terror: Rape, Sexual Violence, and the Hebrew Bible*, Rhiannon Graybill admits to actively trying to avoid writing about the horrors of sexual violence in the Hebrew Bible.[10] Graybill's title is a clear reference to Phyllis Trible's book *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. Trible's reference to these texts as "texts of terror" demonstrates the squeamish, uncomfortable, and outright horrified feelings we get when we read these texts. Yet these texts are still worth reading. They are not simply shock for shock's sake.

The account of Tamar's rape in 2 Samuel 13 is one of these terror texts. The narrative portrays malicious scheming, incest, rape, abandonment, bloody revenge, and fratricide. This text is the launching point that will lead the Kingdom of Israel into a violent civil war between son and father. The passage describes the brutal rape of a princess, Tamar, by her own brother, Amnon. Her other brother, Absalom, reacts to Tamar's rape by killing Amnon and fleeing into exile. Trible describes Tamar's fate as "unrelieved suffering."[11] Craig Morrison in his commentary on 2 Samuel, cites the rape of Tamar as "unbearable to read."[12] He depicts the

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[10] Rhiannon Graybill, *Texts After Terror: Rape, Sexual Violence, and the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 1.

[11] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror*: *Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, Overtures to Biblical Theology 13 (Fortress Press, 1984), 37.

[12] Craig Morrison. *2 Samuel*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew and Narrative Poetry (Liturgical Press, 2013), 166.

feeling of terror that comes over the audience while reading the narrative's horrors. "We watch in dread as the childlike Tamar approaches her predator, ready to hand-feed him with fresh baked delicacies."[13] This is the same feeling of dread that the audience feels when watching the cloaked cameraman approach the prostitute in the opening minutes of *Peeping Tom* or when we see Michael Myers standing behind some bushes while an unaware babysitter starts a load of laundry.

This dread is the foundation of the horror genre. The audience is aware that something is amiss even if our protagonist has not yet been clued in. The opening verses of 2 Samuel 13 does exactly this. We know Amnon and Jonadab's scheme from the beginning and are still forced to watch as the trap is laid for Tamar. The tension builds as she preps the dough, bakes the bread, and brings the cakes to Amnon. We shudder when Amnon grabs her, and we wince as Tamar pleads for Amnon to stop. We scream with Tamar when she is finally released. We side with Absalom when he demands blood for Amnon's crime. Yet we will eventually turn on Absalom during his rebellion through the subsequent chapters.

There is no doubt that the story in 2 Samuel 13 is horrifying. Applying a horror lens to the text seems like a logical exercise, yet, currently, no one has approached this passage through horror theory. Scholarship has focused on Tamar and what she might represent to ancient Israel, or how the passage reflects the leadership of King David. Some scholars have chosen to focus on the horrible treatment of women in the passage and what the passage might imply about the status of women in ancient Israel. I am proposing that a look at 2 Samuel 13 with an eye to horror offers deeper insights into how the text criticizes the House of David and the idea of kingship in ancient Israel.

[13] Morrison, *2 Samuel*, 166.

Before we can examine 2 Samuel 13 as a horror text, one must first ask what exactly qualifies as a horror text. Renowned Master of Horror, Stephen King, begins his nonfiction exploration of horror, *Danse Macabre,* by describing two different movies he saw in a movie theater as a child. King describes a scene in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* in which an alien descends the runway from a flying saucer before hundreds of soldiers, all aiming their weapons at the alien. The alien, Klaatu, begins to fidget for something before a soldier preemptively shoots the alien in the arm. It is revealed that Klaatu had brought a present for the President, not a weapon. Contrarily, King then describes seeing a different sci-fi movie in the same movie theater six years later. This movie *Earth versus the Flying Saucers* did not hold the same optimistic hopes as the previous film. This film had snarling monsters and giant death rays, all hoping to destroy Washington, D.C. "It is the space between these two philosophies that the terror was seeded, I think. If there is a line of force between such neatly opposing ideas, then the terror almost certainly grew there."[14] King is referring to the terror we feel when we are faced with the unknown. The idea that aliens not only exist but are capable of intergalactic space travel threatens the world we know. We would no longer be at the top of the food chain, the Anthropocene would cease to exist.[15] Terror and fear take root in this fear that the world is not how we perceive it to be. This is where horror begins to grow.

King posits that all horror media is built on two levels: the "gross out" and "art-horror."[16] The "gross out" is the more identifiable aspect of horror. It is the disgusting moment that makes the audience squirm, squeal, and scream. It is the image of flies and maggots decaying flesh. It is

[14] Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (Simon and Schuster, 2011), 2.

[15] P. J. Crutzen and E. F. Stoermer, "The Anthropocene," *Global Change Newsletter*, no. 41 (200) 7-18.

[16] King, *Danse Macabre*, 3-4.

the child, Regan, vomiting pea soup in *The Exorcist*. It is the blood, guts, and gore that have made the genre infamous.

The second level, for King, is less visceral but just as effective. "Is horror art? On this second level, the work of horror can be nothing else; it achieves the level of art simply because it is looking for something beyond art, something that predates art: it is looking for what I would call phobic pressure points. The good horror tale will dance its way to the center of your life and find the secret door to the room you believed no one, but you knew of."[17] King turns to a different alien movie, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. In this movie, the aliens are neither snarling monsters nor are they glowing humanoids. Rather, they look just like us. There is no distinction between them and us. "The pod people are just a little different, that's all. A little vague. A little messy."[18] These pod people represent what Sigmund Freud refers to as the uncanny.[19] The pod people are not scary per se. They don't gross us out and they don't elicit any visceral disgust. Yet, when we see them, we are filled with a sense of dread as if something is off. King refers to it as "the creeps." A common interpretation of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is that it is a "red scare" film. The central theme driving "red scare" films is that the communists were not planning a military invasion of the United States but were, in fact, already here living among us. Whether Don Siegel intended this allegory or not, the film still strikes at pressure points. "This is the real danse macabre. I suspect: those remarkable moments when the creator of a horror story is able to unite the conscious and the subconscious mind with one potent idea."[20] The power of horror is to find these pressure points in the backs of our subconscious and shine a

[17] King, *Danse Macabre,* 4.
[18] King, *Danse Macabre,* 5.
[19] Sigmund Freud's understanding of the uncanny and how it relates to horror will be addressed in chapter 2.
[20] King, *Danse Macabre*, 6-7.

floodlight on them. Horror tales find the skeleton in the minds of society's closets and open them up for the world to see. Horror wants to see the secrets that civil society has hidden and share them. Horror has a way of finding the very fears and anxieties of a society and bringing them out of the shadows and shining a light on them.

Noel Carroll takes a similar approach to King in his understanding of what denotes the horror genre against other genre markers. Carroll claims that the western genre is primarily defined by its setting and the musical genre is defined by the presence of song. Horror is defined by the particular emotion it stirs in its audience. "Indeed, the genres of suspense, mystery, and horror derive their very names from the effects they are intended to promote - a sense of suspense, a sense of mystery, and a sense of horror. The cross-art, cross-media genre of horror takes its title from the emotion it characteristically or rather ideally promotes; this emotion constitutes the identifying mark of horror."[21] That is to say that horror stories are simply those stories that invoke horror in its audience.

Carroll goes on to argue that horror stories are stories that contain monsters from supernatural or sci-fi origins. Those stories that contain human monsters, Carroll categorizes as "tales of terror." Carroll argues, "Correlating horror with the presence of monsters gives us a neat way of distinguishing it from terror, especially of the sort rooted in tales of abnormal psychologies. Similarly, by using monsters or other supernatural entities as a criterion of horror, one can separate horror stories from Gothic exercises.[22] I disagree with Carroll on this point and believe that his attempt to separate horror away from the gothic tale or tales of suspense is pedantic. His understanding of monsters can easily be applied to monstrous humans like Norman

[21] Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror: Or Paradoxes of the Heart*. (Routledge, 2003), 14

[22] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 15.

Bates or *Peeping Tom*'s Mark Lewis. I hope to employ Carroll's definitions more broadly to non-supernatural beings.[23]

Carroll further quantifies horror monsters away from other monsters that might appear in stories. He argues that fairy tales and myths are full of monsters, but these monsters are a part of the everyday world system. Horror monsters are regarded by the humans in the story as "abnormal, as disturbances of the natural order." Carroll argues that the horror tale is denoted as horror for the feelings of horror that the tale evokes in its audience. Horror monsters are horror monsters because of the way that the characters react to them. When Mitch Brenner opens his front door to see his entire house covered in hundreds of birds in *The Birds* (1963), he is filled with horror. So is the audience. When a giant 8-foot tall, yellow bird walks down Sesame Street, we are full of joy because the human characters in the show are happy to see their friend Big Bird. Despite *The Birds* being nothing more than common seagulls, ravens, and crows, the flock is monstrous because of how the characters react to them. Thus, the horror tale is a tale of emotion.

Carroll follows the foundation laid by King that horror must elicit disgust (King's gross out) and fear. Carroll further suggests that the horror genre is one that elicits these feelings in its audiences through the feelings of the characters. "Our responses are supposed to converge with those of the characters; like the characters we assess the monster as a horrifying sort of being. This mirroring effect, moreover, is a key feature of the horror genre. For it is not the case for every genre that the audience response is supposed to repeat certain elements of the emotional

[23] I am not the first scholar to employ Carroll in this manner. Brandon Grafius notes that Carroll's definition is too narrow and should include monstrous humans such as Norman Bates and Hannibal Lecter. See Brandon Grafius, *Reading the Bible with Horror* (Lexington Books/Fortress Press, 2020), 17.

state of characters."[24] We shudder because the character shudders. We scream because the character screams.

Carroll examines a moment from Bram Stroker's novel *Dracula,* where Jonathan Harker describes shuddering at the feeling of Count Dracula's hand touching him or the nausea he felt at the smell of Dracula's breath. These actions elicit a mirroring effect in the audience when we might physically shudder while reading this passage. Or at the very least, understand the reactions that the characters are feeling. Carroll then argues that this mirroring effect can help us identify a horror story, not based on the emotions of an audience member but by the emotions of the very characters in the story. "That is, rather than characterizing art-horror solely on the basis of our own subjective responses, we can ground our conjectures on observations of the way in which characters respond to the monsters in works of horror….Then we can begin to portray art-horror by noting the typical emotional features that authors and directors attribute to characters molested by monsters."[25] Thus, we can identify a horror story by identifying the emotions that the characters feel when they encounter a monster.

It is not simply enough to identify a horror tale. The purpose of this dissertation is to place 2 Samuel 13 in conversation with horror. I am not trying to prove that the Biblical author used horror to write Samuel but rather trying to glean what viewing 2 Samuel 13 in conversation with horror studies may offer us. This dissertation will offer a new view to understanding 2 Samuel 13 in light of our understanding of contemporary horror media. I argue that 2 Samuel 13 should be understood as a horror story because the chapter contains many tropes, literary devices, and messages that are common in the horror genre. This is not to say that the author of 2 Samuel 13 was aware of what tropes and devices make up horror stories, nor do I wish to apply

[24] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 18.
[25] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 18-19.

anachronistic terms to the passage. However, treating the text as a horror story and using the same methodology that horror scholars may use when analyzing a modern text will shine new light on the meaning of the text. Brandon Grafius argues that it is not up to us to determine if these texts are horror, but to ask how horror helps us understand these texts. "The purpose of these studies should be to make creative connections, to uncover meanings in the text that may be lying dormant, and to place these texts in conversation with our own culture. Horror can provide a bridge for doing that, as it offers us a template of concepts, narrative structure, and vocabulary that we can apply to the biblical text."[26] The purpose of this study is to learn what horror can teach us about 2 Samuel 13.

Within this discussion, I will attempt to understand why ancient Israel would include such a horrifying story in its literature. While this dissertation is not primarily concerned with how the events of 2 Samuel 13 affects David's political reputation, it is still noteworthy. Leah Rediger Schulte comments, "The rape narratives of the *pilegesh* and Tamar are closely connected through the monarchy; the first rape occurs before there is a king in Israel, but the second rape occurs after the monarchy has begun, which strongly suggests the new monarchial structure does not offer a solution but rather creates the same problem."[27] Horror has the ability of shining a light on what a culture fears the most. In v. 12, Tamar argues with Amnon stating "No, my brother, do not force me, for such a thing is not done in Israel." This is a variation of a similar phrase found in the other two rape-and-revenge narratives.[28] Tamar's plea that such a thing is not

[26] Brandon Grafius, "Horror and Bible (Six Theses)," in Joseph Laycock and Natasha L. Mickles, *Religion, Culture, and the Monstrous: Of Gods and Monsters* (Lexington Press, 2021), 34.

[27] Leah Rediger Schulte, *The Absence of God in Biblical Rape Narratives*. Emerging Scholars (Fortress Press, 2017), 53.

[28] Genesis 34:7 and Judges 19:30.

done in Israel is striking because it has already happened twice before and this time it is done by the King's heir. The horror that occurred in Genesis 34 and Judges 19 has not been extinguished by a monarchy. Examining this story through its intertextual relationship with Genesis 34 and Judges 19, though a horror lens, illuminates the underlying fears of ancient Israel.

It is also important to recognize that 2 Samuel 13 follows a rape-and-revenge narrative structure. It would be superficial to read this passage as a simple polemic against David's leadership. Rape-and-revenge horror stories are never so black-and-white. The rape is committed by monsters, but the stories ask of their audience, does the revenge create monsters of us? The story plays with the audience's perspective and how we react to the actions of the characters. The audience watches in horror as Amnon's plan unfolds. The audience screams in horror when Tamar rips her clothes and screams. The audience cheers when Absalom enacts his revenge and yet the audience sympathizes with David when he hears of Amnon's death. The passage is complex, but a horror method offers a way to navigate the text. This dissertation will argue that horror theory illuminates how 2 Samuel 13 engages her audience on an emotional level, offering insight into the fears of ancient Israel.

On a final note, this text is considered a difficult text because of its extreme sexual violence and much of the discussion of this dissertation will surround the topic of rape and incest. Rhiannon Graybill recounts her initial hesitation in writing about the biblical rape texts. In her hesitation she states, "I dabbled in horror and horror theory (where the most horrific violence becomes not a problem to be solved but a feature to be celebrated)."[29] Graybill's depiction of horror celebrating violence is certainly not unfounded. *Fangoria* is an entire magazine based on

[29] Graybill, *Texts After Terror*, 1.

how art directors and special effect artists make the very gore that disgusts its audience. The Chainsaw awards give a trophy to the best kill in a horror movie from the previous year. With that said, I hope to approach these topics, not in celebration of the atrocities of 2 Samuel 13, but with respect to these topics. Considering Carroll's mirroring effect, when Tamar screams after the horror that had just happened to her and in terror of what will become of her life, we too scream.

History of Scholarship on 2 Samuel

In 1926, Leonhard Rost published his book, *The Succession to the Throne of David*, where he argues that the stories of David can be broken up along the lines of style. For Rost, he breaks up the life of David into the Ark Narrative, the Prophecy of Nathan, the Account of the Ammonite War, and the Succession Story. Rost defines the Succession story as 2 Samuel 9-20 and 1 Kings 1 and 2. Rost's work comes out of source criticism that was so popular during his lifetime. But rather than searching for sources, Rost focused on the themes, characters, and style that tied the narratives together. "It must be shown how each account makes use of speech in the narrative; how, also, the one tells its story in one breath while the other likes to round off clearly each individual scene within the whole framework and so to string its narrative together scene by scene."[30] For Rost, these scenes are not mini-stories strung together by a redactor but a full narrative telling a specific story with its own themes and style.

Following in Rost's footsteps, R. N. Whybray's 1968 book, *The Succession Narrative: A Study of II Samuel 9-20; 1 Kings 1 and 2*, argues that the Succession Narrative acts as an ancient

[30] Leonhard Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David*, trans. Michael D. Rutter and D. M. Gunn (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 4.

Israelite novel. He argues that Israel experienced a cultural enlightenment during the reign of David. This was brought about by David unifying Israel and bringing the small, Canaanite kingdom on the international stage.[31] With international contact came international influence. David began to appoint court officials trained in the language and literature of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Whybray suggests that a scribal school would have been established in Jerusalem mimicking those found in Egypt and Babylonia.[32]

Scribal training would have included practical and political learnings as well as literature. These ideas, in Whybray's opinion, would push Israel into a cultural enlightenment. "Among its characteristics was a pragmatic and rational outlook. The wisdom of the scribes was an activity pursued independently of religious institutions, which exhibited a detached curiosity about the natural world and about human nature."[33] The cultural flourish would lead to the writings of Proverbs, the prophetical books, Deuteronomy, and the Decalogue.[34] Whybray alludes to Gerhard von Rad's study of the wisdom teaching in the Joseph Narrative and concludes that if the Joseph Cycle is a sort of novel, then we can make the same assumption about the Succession Narrative. Whybray goes on to examine the Succession Narrative as a novel, examining its themes, structures, characters, and style that work as a national epic and political propaganda in support of Solomon.

In his 1968 Presidential address at the Society of Biblical Literature, James Muilenburg set out to (1) defend the Form Criticism that had been popularized by Hermann Gunkel; and (2) introduce another methodology that goes beyond Form Criticism, which Muilenburg referred to

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[31] R. N. Whybray, *The Succession Narrative: A Study of II Samuel 9-20; 1 Kings 1 and 2* (Alec R. Allenson, 1968), 1-2.

[32] Whybray, *The Succession Narrative*, 3.

[33] Whybray, *The Succession Narrative*, 4.

[34] Whybray, *The Succession Narrative,* 5.

as Rhetorical Criticism.[35] Form Criticism asks what the basic structure of the text is and how the reader will interpret a text based on knowing the text's form. Muilenburg states, "The basic contention of Gunkel is that the ancient men of Israel, like their Near Eastern neighbors, were influenced in their speech and their literary compositions by convention and custom. We therefore encounter in a particular genre or *Gattung* the same structural forms, the same terminology and style, and the same *Sitz im Leben*."[36] Rhetorical criticism goes beyond these questions and engages the text on a literary level. It asks questions about the aesthetics and literary devices that the author is employing. Muilenberg notes:

> What I am interested in, above all, is in understanding the nature of Hebrew literary composition, in exhibiting the structural patterns that are employed for the fashioning of a literary unit, whether in poetry or in prose, and in discerning the many and various devices by which the predications are formulated and ordered into a unified whole. Such an enterprise I should describe as rhetoric and the methodology as rhetorical criticism.[37]

Muilenburg is not interested in replacing form criticism with rhetorical criticism, but believes that both can work together to engage with the text on a literary level. While Form Criticism and Rhetorical Criticism do not come without their flaws, these are the foundations for how I will engage with 2 Samuel 13 as a horror text.

In 1981, Dutch scholar J. P. Fokkelman released volume 1 of his *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*. The first volume concerns itself with 2 Samuel 9-20, and 1 Kings 1-2, known as the Succession Narrative. In these volumes, Fokkelman rejects a specific methodology but instead chooses to let the text dictate how he engages with it. "Disposing of a ready-made, worked-out system of techniques and methodologies is pretentious and risky… By committing oneself to a method beforehand, the reader limits himself *eo ipso* and simultaneously

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[35] James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88, no. 1 (1969): 1-18.

[36] Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," 4.

[37] Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," 8.

furthers the reduction of his contact to cognitive aspects alone. I myself strive to derive my method from the work itself."[38] Fokkelman goes on to suggest that "true interpretation" comes from the literary experience itself. "[It requires the readers'] imagination, empathy, intuition, and reason."[39] Fokkelman's main analysis of 2 Samuel 13 is based on G.P. Rideout's analysis of the text as a chiasmus:

A Amnon in love with Tamar (v. 1)
B Intervention of Jonadab (vv. 3-5)
C Tamar's arrival (vv. 6-9s)
D Amnon's servants are ordered to leave (v. 9b)
E Amnon commands Tamar to lie with him;
She pleads but to no avail (vv. 11-144a)
F. Amnon rapes Tama, and love turns into hate
(vv.14b-15a)
E' Amnon commands Tamar to depart;
D' Amnon's servant is recalled (v. 17)
C' Tamar's departure (vv. 18sq.)
B' Intervention of Absalom (v. 20)
A' Absalom hates Amnon (vv. 21sq.)[40]

Fokkelman's analysis is largely literary focusing on the structure of the passage. To its end, the text draws a connection between David in chapter 11 and Amnon in chapter 13.

P. Kyle McCarter's Anchor Bible Commentary on 1 Samuel (1980) and II Samuel (1984) is the first commentary to engage fully with the textual variants after the finding and publication of Old Greek manuscripts and especially the Dead Sea Scrolls.[41] McCarter writes in his introductory comments of his 1 Samuel commentary, "The received Hebrew text of Samuel in its

[38] J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses*, vol. 1, *King David (II Sam. 9-20 & I Kings 1-2)* (Van Gorcum, 1981), 3.

[39] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, 5.

[40] Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, 100.

[41] P. Kyle McCarter, *I Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (Yale University Press; Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021); and P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (Yale University Press; Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021).

Masoretic dress (MT) is in poor repair. It is a short text, but its shortness is not the wholesome shortness of a text free of expansion and interpolation; rather it is the result of countless copying errors and omission, some of them extensive, scattered throughout the book."[42] McCarter builds off of seminal works such as Wellhausen's *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis untersucht*[43] and S. R. Driver's *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Samuel.*[44] While Wellhausen and Driver's works innovated textual criticism, they were both published pre 1952 when the recovery of Cave IV at Qumran began. Excavators found extremely important scrolls at Qumran for the study of text criticism and the book of Samuel, such as 4QSama, 4QSamb, and 4QSamc.[45] These manuscripts would support many of the textual peculiarities of the Septuagint and reignite the LXX as a standard source in textual criticism. McCarter's commentaries are engaging these various sources to come to concluding translations.

Robert Polzin's three-volume study of the Deuteronomist: *Moses and the Deuteronomist* (1980), *Samuel and the Deuteronomist* (1989), and *David and the Deuteronomist* (1993), looks to explore the Deuteronomistic Literature as a whole, instead of fragmented texts that Polzin describes as plaguing biblical scholarship.[46] The idea that 1 and 2 Samuel are an extension of a larger Deuteronomistic history originated with Martin Noth. Polzin rejects the idea of reading the text outside of its Deuteronomistic context. He attacks McCarter's commentary as doing just that:

> Take Kyle McCarter's commentaries on 1 and 2 Samuel in the Anchor Bible. No one would deny his contribution to the text criticism and textual history of 1 and 2 Samuel or

[42] McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 5.
[43] Julius Wellhausen, *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis*. (Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1872).
[44] S.R. Driver. *Notes on the Hebrew Text of Samuel* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004).
[45] McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 6-7.
[46] Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges* (Seabury Press, 1980); Robert Polzin *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: 1 Samuel*. (Indiana University Press, 1993); Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: 1 Samuel* (Indiana University Press, 1993).

> the judicious way he establishes a specific ancient text as a basis for his translation and interpretation. But having accomplished his task of translation McCarter spends the rest of the over one thousand pages at his disposal mostly attending to matters of literary or cultural history.[47]

This unified reading of the text leads Polzin to understand 2 Samuel 13 ultimately as a text about Absalom. "When we also reflect upon the concurrent perspectives whereby both narrator and character's name various individuals in the story, we find that the events recounted here are clearly structured as an introduction to the larger story about David and his son Absalom that will concern the reader through chapter 19."[48] For Polzin, the rape of Tamar is not a story about Tamar but about setting the ground for Absalom's attempt at David's throne.

David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell's *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* pushed Hebrew Bible scholarship away from the historical criticism popular for a large part of the 20th century and suggested that scholars stop trying to reconstruct the past but examine the text through literary analysis.[49] "Until recently…scholarly analysis of the Bible was aimed at determining the meaning of the text. For scholars in the dominant 'historical-critical' school, that meant usually the 'original' meaning, constructed out of hypotheses regarding the compositional history of the text, together with identifying and locating its authors(s)/editors(s) and 'original' audience/readers."[50] Gunn and Fewell reject this approach to biblical scholarship in favor of literary criticism. "Where historical criticism sought meaning in the origins or sources of biblical texts, we take the final form as our primary text. Instead of attempting to reconstruct an ancient 'history' we read these narratives as we might read modern novels or short stories, constructing a story world in which questions of human values and belief (and theology) find shape in relation

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[47] Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, 1.

[48] Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, 135.

[49] David M. Gunn, and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford University Press, 1993).

[50] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 7.

to our own worlds."[51] This approach places less emphasis on objective readings of the Bible and more room for subjective interpretation.

Antony Campbell's commentaries on 1 and 2 Samuel for the Forms of the Old Testament Literature series interpret the books of Samuel through form criticism.[52] Campbell states, "Form criticism is the endeavor to identify the form of a text; the initial apprehension is usually intuitive, to be confirmed by more reflective and detailed observation. A form critic needs to have some notion of what the literary genres are and some idea of the criteria by which they are identified."[53] Campbell uses as an example someone asking you, "How are you?" Your response to this person will differ depending on whether you are speaking to a friend, a doctor, or a therapist. A friend-you may respond by telling woes of workplace drama. A doctor-you may respond with a list of symptoms and ailments. A therapist-you may respond with anxieties that have been plaguing your psyche. Knowing the context and setting is vital to interpreting a text.

Campbell defines the genre of 2 Samuel 13 as a through story, namely three stories in one. He notes that there are three substories that make up one unified story: Amnon and the rape of Tamar; Absalom and the murder of Amnon; and Joab and the return of Absalom.[54] These three substories combine to create one unified story, which Campbell calls "the story of the impact of David's folly on David's family."[55] For Campbell, the story of Amnon's rape of Tamar is about David and how his sin in chapters 11 and 12 is now being brought on to his family. Campbell compares the genre and structure of David's taking of Bathsheba with Amnon's rape

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[51] Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 9.

[52] Antony F. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, Forms of Old Testament Literature (W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2003), and Antony F. Campbell, *2 Samuel*, Forms of Old Testament Literature (W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005).

[53] Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 24.

[54] Campbell, *2 Samuel*, 135.

[55] Campbell, *2 Samuel*, 135.

of Tamar. While David acts in chapters 11 and 12, he is passive in chapters 13 and 14. While Campbell's work on form criticism is important, he does not go far enough in defining the genre and specifically the horror devices that the Biblical author is using.

In 1984, Phyllis Trible released her seminal feminist work *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*.[56] In this book, Trible takes a literary approach to some of the more horrifying texts of the Hebrew Bible, following the rhetorical criticism of James Muilenburg. Trible is not using horror studies to approach these texts but is using a feminist lens to examine the texts of the Hebrew Bible that readers consider most troublesome. "In this book my task is to tell sad stories as I hear them. Indeed, they are tales of terror with women as victims. Belonging to the four portraits of suffering in ancient Israel: Hagar, the slave used, abused, and rejected; Tamar, the princess raped and discarded; an unnamed woman, the concubine raped, murdered, and dismembered; and the daughter of Jephthah, a virgin slain and sacrificed."[57] Trible's largest influence is her feminist lens, bringing feminist approaches to biblical studies. Trible states, "As a critique of culture and faith in light of misogyny, feminism is a prophetic movement, examining the status quo, pronouncing judgment, and calling for repentance. This hermeneutic engages scripture in various ways… It cites and evaluates long neglected data that show the inferiority, subordination, and abuse of the female in ancient Israel and the early church."[58]

Trible approaches 2 Samuel 13 by focusing the story primarily on Tamar. Trible characterizes Tamar as the embodiment of wisdom giving, acknowledging Tamar's wisdom and competence at arguing with Amnon. Trible points to Proverbs 7:4-5 (RSV), "Say to wisdom,

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[56] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, (Fortress Press, 1984).

[57] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 1.

[58] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 3.

'My sister are you,' and call insight an intimate friend to preserve you from the loose woman, from the adventurer with her smooth words."[59] Trible points out that Amnon did speak to the wise woman and call her sister. Yet he still raped her. Trible concludes, "If sister wisdom can protect a young man from the loose woman, who will protect sister wisdom from the loose man, symbolized not by a foreigner but by her very own brother?"[60] Trible's feminist approach centralizes the text back onto the true victim of the text: Tamar. For all the political shifting, the text is still about a woman who, as smart as she is, still a victim of a system built against her.

Frank Yamada's 2008 book, *Configurations of Rape in the Hebrew Bible: A Literary Analysis of Three Rape Narratives,* took the three major rape-and-revenge narratives in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 35, Judges 19, and 2 Samuel 13) and compared them in search of larger themes.[61] Yamada engages all three "rape texts" on their literary connections, feminist interpretations, and cultural interpretations. Yamada's thesis argues that there is a connection between all three rape texts. "The present work argues that Gen 34, Judg 19, and 2 Sam 13 bear a family resemblance to one another, displaying similar thematic elements, progression and outcome. The texts all display a similar movement from the original rape of one woman to further retributive violence between men to some form of social fragmentation."[62] The three texts are connected on an intertextual level, talking to each other but still expressing their own meaning in their own context.

For 2 Samuel 13, Yamada argues that the text is borne out of 2 Samuel 12 and Nathan's oracle against the house of David. The sword comes to the house of David in the form of Amnon

[59] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 56.
[60] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 57.
[61] Frank Yamada, *Configurations of Rape in the Hebrew Bible: A Literary Analysis of Three Rape Narratives* (Peter Lang, 2008).
[62] Yamada, *Configurations of Rape in the Hebrew Bible*, 25-36.

who rapes his sister, causing her brother, Absalom, to kill Amnon. The original rape, just as the other two rape texts, according to Yamada, leads to male retribution and social fragmentation. This happens in the form of Absalom's murder of Amnon and eventually Absalom's revolt against the kingdom of David.

Rhiannon Graybill's *Texts After Terror: Rape, Sexual Violence, and the Hebrew Bible* attempts to reengage with the rape texts of the Hebrew Bible in a way that talks openly about these texts and how raped stories are often talked about.[63] Graybill's title is clearly influenced by Phyllis Trible's *Text of Terror*. Graybill's book is a reengagement, perhaps described as post-Trible, with these rape texts. Graybill writes,

> In 1984, Phyllis Trible introduced the phrase 'text of terror' as a way of describing especially violent and terrible stories involving biblical women. The phrase has become a standard shorthand for stories of extreme sexual or misogynistic violence. But while 'Texts of Terror' furnishes Trible with her title, and is overwhelmingly cited as a phrase, it is only a partial representation of the critical paradigm she describes.[64]

While Trible was concerned with the texts that were full of terror and horror, Graybill is concerned with what happens after the text. "But more than terror, I am interested in the question of the after. What comes after sexual violence? What happens to us after we read 'texts of terror,' or *Texts of Terror*? What kind of *afters* are possible?"[65]

Graybill introduces her approach to "rape stories" as "fuzzy, messy, icky."[66] For Graybill, rape stories are often not black-and-white. They are complicated stories distorted by the facts of the narrative; yet they are still stories of violence. Graybill describes the *fuzziness* of rape as the complexity of "What happened?" The victims of date rape drugs and assault often are "fuzzy" on the details of the events that happened. Graybill points out that Chanel Miller, the victim of

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[63] Graybill, *Texts After Terror.*
[64] Graybill, *Texts After Terror*, 3.
[65] Graybill, *Texts After Terror,* 3. Emphasis Graybill.
[66] Graybill, *Texts After Terror,* 11.

Brock Turner, has no recollection of her own rape. Yet she was raped. Graybill's term *messy* goes on to describe narratives with "complications that ensue when the stories of victims or survivors fail to fit into a tidy preordained narrative of suffering and recovery… *Messy* can also describe a certain kind of person, nearly always a woman. A woman who is 'too much' is messy in her appearance, her emotions, or both."[67] Graybill's lists a third term she describes as *icky*. Graybill points to Kristen Roupenian's *Cat People,* which describes a woman who begins a flirtatious relationship with a man that leads to very unpleasant sex.[68] The story ends with the man calling the protagonist a "whore." "The overwhelming sense in 'Cat Person' and in the other stories in Roupenian's debut collection, *You Know You Want This,* is ickiness. Robert teeters between potable and reprehensible; most frequently, he comes across as a bit creepy."[69]

Graybill goes on to categorize 2 Samuel 13 as a messy text. She points out that both feminist scholars and non-feminist scholars agree that the text seems to promote the succession narrative as the issue at hand. "It is not Tamar, the raped daughter, but Absalom, the wronged brother and beloved son, who is the emotional focus of the passage."[70] The story is further complicated by Tamar's plea for Amnon to marry her. "In expressing this desire, Tamar fails to act as a victim of sexual violence 'ought' to act. She does not display proper self-actualization, or a Tarantino-esque desire for vengeance. Her failure to conform to expectation is not only a modern perception; Absalom urges her not to fuss."[71] Graybill's analysis of rape stories and her categorizations as *fuzzy, messy, icky*, add a level of complication to the rape story. Rape narratives are not always black-and-white nor is the revenge that we often get with these tales.

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[67] Graybill, *Texts After Terror*, 15.
[68] Kristen Roupenian, "You Know You Want It," *The New Yorker*, December 11, 2017.
[69] Graybill, *Texts After Terror*, 16.
[70] Graybill, *Texts After Terror,* 43.
[71] Graybill, *Texts After* Terror, 43.

As with all horror, there are intricacies and specifics with each tale that challenge the larger narrative. Genesis 34, Judges 19, and 2 Samuel 13 are all in conversation with each other, but they are each their own story with their own complications and their own message.

This dissertation will build off the work mentioned above while ultimately going in a new direction. I recognize that 2 Sam 13 falls into a larger narrative that Leonhard Rost and R.N. Whybray correctly label the succession narrative. 2 Sam 13 introduces two characters that both have claim to their father's throne, though neither will permanently obtain it. Yet this text is more than a political drama explaining why Amnon and Absalom are not suitable for kingship. Looking at the text through a horror lens illuminates the cultural critique at the center of the text. In some ways Horror studies is like form criticism in that it is interested in the structure and tropes of the text. Noel Carroll's complex discovery plot is a type of horror form criticism.[72] Horror studies is similar to the rhetorical criticism laid by James Muilenburg in that both are interested in the literary qualities that engage the reader of the text. While this dissertation engages with visual media, it is first and foremost a literary text. We must be aware of the literary composition of the text and how it uses horror as a literary tool to engage with the reader. Horror was first a literary genre long a director pointed a camera at something scary.

I will also engage with feminist readings of the text. While the text can boil down to a simple political drama setting up the succession narrative, the heart and soul of the story is Tamar. Phyllis Trible is correct to point out the Tamar's wisdom in how she deals with Amnon. While Dinah of Genesis 34 and the woman in Judges 19 are given very few words, Tamar lays out a cogent argument that ultimately falls on deaf ears. Graybill notes the messiness and ickiness of the whole situation. The cultural norms of 2 Sam 13 dictate that Tamar must marry

[72] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 99.

her assailant and thus we see her arguing for Amnon to marry her. A feminist reading allows for Tamar to speak truth of the horrors of her situation. A horror reading shines light on this cultural norm and critiques it.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This dissertation is attempting to engage the text of 2 Samuel 13 through a horror lens to better understand the meaning of the text. To do this, we must first understand how horror is often utilized to explore a culture's deep-seated fears. Scholars have asked questions about horror and what horror stories tell us for the past century, beginning in psychoanalysis and moving towards sociological interpretations. Once we understand how horror studies engages with horror stories, we will then look at how Bible and Religion scholars have engaged with monsters and horror. This will begin with Timothy Beal study of religious monsters and move towards the work of Brandon Grafius, who has written extensively the past few years on how horror can help us understand the Bible. This dissertation is built off of Grafius' methodological approaches.

The answer to the question "what is horror" has proven to be more complicated than one might expect. Of course, with all questions of taxonomy, scholars throw around definitions and categories without ever fully satisfying anyone. Although the "I know it when I see it" cliché is perhaps too much of a refusal to define, people tend to know what one means when they refer to horror. If you are watching a television show and a commercial for an upcoming movie comes on, there are certain tells that let the viewer know that this is a horror movie, even without saying it: the sharpness of the music, the angles of the frame, and the story hint that there is some secret lurking beneath the surface. The commercial shows a normal happy family moving into a normal, albeit old, house. The family is happy and excited to start their new life in their new home. Yet, as the trailer continues, it lets us know that the house is not as pristine as the family once hoped. Ghosts prowl in the basement and skeletons crowd in the closet. These untold secrets lurk beneath the surface, unseen and unspoken. This is the central point to any horror

story. Horror is honest; it seeks out the truth and shines light on that which has been forced to dwell in the shadows. Horror is obsessed with allegories and metaphors. Zombies can be a representation of the mindless droves led by consumerism. Ghosts drive a wedge into a family haunted by the father's alcoholism. Horror lifts the veil and opens the closets to reveal that the normalcy shown in the first act was all but a fraud.

Any discussion of horror must begin with Sigmund Freud's *The Uncanny* (1919). In his essay, Freud takes a psychoanalytical approach to the German word *unheimlic* which translates in English as "uncanny." Freud consults Ernst Jentsch's exploration of the word in his 1906 article "Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen," where he ultimately concludes that the feeling associated with the uncanny is that which is not known or familiar. Freud points out that the *unheimlich* is the opposite of the *heimlich,* "familiar." In short, Jentsch ascribes to the uncanny a feeling of "intellectual uncertainty."[1] Freud argues that this definition is incomplete and fails to grab the true feeling that the uncanny stirs in its recipients. Freud goes into a lengthy etymology of *unheimlich* before focusing on a secondary definition of *heimlich*: "concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know about it." Thus, the *unheimlich* is that which is revealed. For Freud the uncanny is "everything that ought to have remained hidden and secret and has become visible."[2]

Freud continues his discussion of the uncanny with an analysis of E. T. A Hoffman's "The Sand-Man." In the story a man is plagued by his childhood fear of the Sand-Man coming and taking his eye. Freud uses psychoanalytic methods to deduce that the childhood fear of the

[1] Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock and Hugh Haughton (Penguin Books, 2003), 4.

[2] Freud, *The Uncanny*, 4.

eye is associated with the childhood fear of castration, which Freud connects with the Oedipal loss of love. The child losing his eye is equated to the child losing his penis. Thus, Freud's understanding of the uncanny is a feeling of a return of the repressed. The uncanny arises when something that should be familiar to us is combined with a sense of unfamiliarity. While Freud's focus on castration and Oedipal complexes has largely been dismissed by the scholarly community; his understanding of the uncanny as a feeling of terror connected to the revelation of that which was repressed or concealed lays a good starting point for horror theory.

Julia Kristeva builds off Freud's psychoanalytic approaches to the feelings of horror. For Kristeva, the infant is born into a pre-symbolic stage. The moment that a child separates itself as an "I" occurs when the child divorces themselves away from the mother. "The infant is born into the semiotic stage, a pre-symbolic network of emotional drives devoid of linguistic impulses. The ruling figure of the semiotic realm is the mother. To construct themselves as a subject, the infant must struggle to enter the Symbolic order; this occurs when the infant separates from the mother in a process Kristeva refers to as 'matricide."[3] The child is always struggling to identify itself as an *I* separated from their mother. This violent act often leaves psychological scars on the individual. The child must learn that they are an *I* separate from their mother who is also her own *I*. The struggle between the world of the pre-symbolic realm and the symbolic stage leads to the child defining their identity as an autonomous being.

[3] Brandon Grafius, *Reading Phinehas, Watching Slashers: Horror Theory and Numbers 25*. (Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018), 83.

The abject is that which is "being opposed to *I*."[4] Abjection is that which is without category, separating itself from the symbolic order. It must be rejected because it goes against the *I*. It is neither the *I* nor the other. It is without category and thus rejected.

> If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. A certain 'ego' that merged with its master, a superego, has flatly driven it away. It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree with the latter's rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master. Without a sign (for him), it beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out. To each ego its object, to each superego its abject. It is not the white expanse or slack boredom of repression, not the translations and transformations of desire that wrench bodies, nights, and discourse; rather it is a brutish suffering that 'I' puts up with, sublime, and devastated, for 'I' deposits it to the father's account: I endure it, for I imagine that such is the desire of the other. A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now carries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A "something" that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture.[5]

Kristeva's long description defines the abject as that which is without meaning. The ego banishes it because the abject goes against what we have been taught is right. It is rejected, pushed outside the boundaries of our rules, laws, and social norms. When we encounter the abject, it abhors us. Our stomachs turn, we vomit, then scream. We reject it as "outside" of our categories. It is opposed to the *I* and rejected by us. In this act of rejecting the abject as not us, we establish the *I.* I am not the "abject," therefore, I am opposed to the abject.

For Kristeva, the rejection of the abject is intimately connected to identity. If something is abject to us, then we reject it as something opposed to us. We spit it out. The physical

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[4] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S Roudiez, European Perspectives (Columbia University Press, 1982), 1.

[5] Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, 1-2.

reactions of the body as it rejects the abject is the body rejecting that which is without meaning. It is shameful and revolting. "Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck. The shame of compromise, of being in the middle of treachery. The fascinated start that leads me toward and separates me from them."[6] Since the body rejects the abject, the body then goes against the world without meaning. It is then establishing itself firmly in the world of signs. Kristeva gives an example of her stomach turning when her parents gave her a glass of rotten milk.

> Food loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection. When the eyes see or the lips touch that skin on the surface of milk- harmless, thing as a sheet of cigarette paper, pitiful as a nail paring- I experience a gagging sensation, and still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire. Along with sight-clouding dizziness, nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separating me from the mother and father who proffer it. 'I' want none of that element, a sign of their desire; 'I' do not want to listen, 'I' do not assimilate it, 'I' expel it. But since the food is not an 'other' for 'me,' who am only within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish myself…During that course in which 'I' become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit, mute protest of the symptom, shattering violence of a convulsion that, to be sure, is inscribed in a symbolic system, but in which, without either wanting or being able to become integrated in order to answer to it, it reacts, it abreacts. It abjects.[7]

In this example, Kristeva's parents give her a glass of milk which contains skim at the top of the glass. Her parents, who up to this point have always provided her with nutrition and safety, are now the bringers of something that her body rejects. Thus, at this moment her body revolts and vomits not only the milk but also her parent's desire. She is opposed to her parents' desires.

[6] Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, 2.
[7] Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror,* 3.

She is ripped from them and becomes her own subject. Through the action of rejecting the abject, she has become defined.

The concept of abjection can be spoken on a societal level. That which societies reject is abject. Laws and ordinances are enacted and those who break the laws are considered outsiders. They are the scoundrels who move between the alleys, hinterlands, and liminal spaces. They are without law and thus without a society.[8] When we look upon a crime that is considered particularly heinous, it turns our stomach, we turn away in disgust, we ask, "how can something like this have happened?" We refer to the criminals as "lone wolves" or, if it is politically advantageous, we brand the criminal as someone from another culture or society.

> It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection, but disturbs identity, system order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior. Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility.[9]

The crime and the criminal become abject and society rejects them.

This idea of horror as the return of the repressed is highly influential on the 20th century film critic, Robin Wood. In 1979, Wood held a film festival in Toronto called "The American Nightmare." Attendees of the film festival received a program book, which included an essay that laid out Wood's understanding of the relationship between horror films and psychoanalytic theory. Wood states, "The most significant development in film criticism and in progressive ideas generally of the last few decades has clearly been the increasing confluence of Marx and Freud, or more precisely of the traditions of thought arising from them: the recognition that

[8] Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, 5.
[9] Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, 4.

social revolution and sexual revolution are inseparably linked and necessary to each other."[10] The central tenet of horror is the "return of the repressed." Specifically, the ideas and emotions rejected by the capitalist patriarchy. American society holds an "extreme surplus of repression." The main form of repression, for Wood, was sexuality. The movies of the 60s and 70s are centered on sexual repression in American culture. This all culminates in the fear of the other. "Otherness represents that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with in one or two ways: either by rejecting and if possible, annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it, converting it as far as possible into a replica of itself."[11] Wood claims that the American horror audience is most frightened by otherness in race, gender, class, culture, nationality, or sexual orientation.

In his book *The Philosophy of Horror*, Noel Carroll offers an examination of the placement of horror in art. He makes a difference between horror, the emotion you feel when you are scared, and the horror genre found in movies, literature, paintings, music, video games, etc. Carroll refers to this as "art-horror."[12] While Carroll separates horror from the emotion one experiences and that created by art; he is still primarily concerned with the emotion caused by art-horror. "Art-horror is an emotion. It is the emotion that horror narratives and images are designed to elicit from audiences. That is, art-horror names the emotion that the creators of the genre have perennially sought to instill in their audiences…. It is an emotion whose contours are reflected in the emotional responses of the positive human characters to the monsters in works of

[10] Robin Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," in *Robin Wood on the Horror Film: Collected Essays and Reviews*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Wayne State University Press, 2018), 73.

[11] Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," 77.

[12] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 8.

horror."[13] For Carroll, art-horror is intimately connected to the emotions that the art elicits in its audiences: namely fear and disgust. Carroll quotes Jonathan Harker's Journal in Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*. "As the Count leaned over me and his hands touched me, I could not repress a shudder. It may have been that his breath was rank, but a horrible feeling of nausea came over me, which I could not conceal."[14] Carroll points towards this description of Dracula because it emphasizes the emotional reaction Count Dracula causes. The touch of his hand cause Jonathan Harker to physically react. He shudders in fear; the smell of Dracula's breath causes Harker's stomach to turn. For Carroll, the sight of a monster's sharp fangs will cause us to tremor in fear at the thought of being devoured, but also the sight of the monster's droll and the smell of its breath will cause us to revolt in disgust.

One of Carroll's most influential ideas is his explanation of the common plot structure in monster narratives. Carroll calls this the "complex-discovery plot."[15] This plot structure consists of four essential movements: the onset, discovery, confirmation, and confrontation. The onset appears at the beginning of the story and is used to establish the presence of the monster even if the monster is not shown currently. This is seen in *Jurassic Park* when a man falls into a cage with an unseen velociraptor. Or the beginning of *Jaws* when a young woman is pulled under the waves by an unseen force. These scenes introduce the audience to the power of danger even if our protagonists are unaware.

The next step is the discovery wherein a character through investigation discovers that the events surrounding the plot must be due to the presence of a monster. This discovery is often

[13] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 24.
[14] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 17.
[15] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 99

met with skepticism from other characters. The mayor in *Jaws* pushes back on the need to close the beaches. Blinded by money, he rejects the evidence of a monster. The protagonists met with cynicism lead into the next stage: confirmation. "The confirmation function involves the discoverers of or the believers in the existence of the monster convincing some other group of the existence of the creature and of the proportions of the mortal danger at hand."[16] These scenes are often frustrating for the protagonist and the audience alike. The protagonist is already clued into the reality of the monster, but others must be convinced while precious time is wasted. The characters must be convinced beyond any doubt of the monster's existence, which is complicated because monsters by nature defy the logic of societal boundaries.

The complex-discovery plot culminates in the final aspect: confrontation. This is when the protagonist must face the monster in a final showdown. This can end in various ways, though it often ends with humanity's victory over the monster. However, the monster usually escapes only to return in the sequel.

Any discussion of horror theory ought to include a discussion of its sibling methodology "monster theory." While the two are technically different theories, they both use similar ideologies and foundations. The word monster comes from the Latin term *monstrare,* meaning "to show" or "to reveal." This etymology emphasizes a major tenet of monster theory: that is, that monsters at their most basic function are metaphors. Monsters are cultural beings that reveal the deepest fears of society.

Jeffery Jerome Cohen's essay, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," contends that one can learn a lot about a specific society by looking at their monsters. "The monster is born only at this

[16] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 101.

metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy, giving them life and uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture."[17] Cohen lays out seven theses of monster culture:

1. The Monster's Body is a Cultural Body
2. The Monster Always Escapes
3. The Monster Is the Harbinger of Category Crisis
4. The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference
5. The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible
6. Fear of the Monster Is Really a Kind of Desire
7. The Monster Stands at the Threshold of Becoming

For Cohen, a culture's monsters are reflective of society's own fears and anxieties. They are vessels of fear representing that which does not belong in society. Monsters are the cultural other. Cohen goes further to suggest that monsters always come back. By this, he means that the meaning behind monsters can change over time as cultures shift. While the zombies of George A. Romero's 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead* represent the mindless hate of white supremacist lynch mobs, in his 1978 sequel *Dawn of the Dead* the zombie represents the mindless drones of consumerism. These are the same monsters written by the same director, used to convey a different metaphor for a different time in our culture.

Monsters are metaphors found in the liminal spaces of the abject. These creatures are found in the land between societal norms. They live in the woods or the sewers. They do not

[17] Jeffery Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.

obey the laws of our society. They prey on the innocent and vulnerable. They are to be feared because they are not a part of us. It refuses our categories. "This refusal to participate in the classificatory 'order of things' is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so, the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions."[18] Cohen references the description of the Canaanites in Numbers 13. They are portrayed as menacing giants. They are monsters and thus are outside of the correct order of things. Therefore, the Israelites are justified in their invasion of the land because they are rescuing it from the abject.[19] But monsters also act as warnings that one has left the realm of societal order. In Gilgamesh, Gilgamesh and Enkidu travel into the liminal spaces to fight Humbaba. In ancient Mesopotamia, the demons lived out on the steppes. Those who venture into the realm of monsters, literally or figuratively, risk becoming monsters themselves.

Nevertheless, Cohen also suggests that there is something attractive about monsters. "The same creatures who terrify and interdict can evoke potent escapist fantasies; the linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster all the more appealing as a temporary egress from constraint… We distrust and loathe the monster at the same time we envy its freedom, and perhaps its sublime despair."[20] There is something about monsters that we admire. We long for their strength, their power, their speed. Jordan Peele suggests that African Americans admire the killers in horror movies because they can inflict power over their victims. Ultimately, Cohen argues that monsters are a representation of the recesses of society's subconscious. "These monsters ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our

[18] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 6.
[19] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 7-8.
[20] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 17.

perception of difference, our tolerance toward its expression. They ask us why we have created them."[21] Cohen finishes his essay by emphasizing the idea that monsters are ultimately created by their societies. Monsters are reflections of the very cultures that fear them and thus we gain valuable insight into a culture by looking directly at its monsters.

Timothy Beal approaches the relationship between monsters and religion in his 2002 book *Religion and its Monsters*. Beal begins his approach by defining monsters in relation to Freud's theory of the uncanny. "Monsters are personifications of the *unheimlich*. They stand for what endangers one's sense of at homeness… They are figures of chaos and disorientation within order and orientation, revealing deep insecurities in one's faith in oneself, one's society, and one's world."[22] Beal's approach to monsters is like Cohen's in that monsters are representations of culture's anxieties and fears. But Beal also references another possible Latin etymology. He suggests that monster comes from the word *monere* "to warn" or "to portend." Stephen Asma references this etymology to portray monsters as omens for God's wrath.[23] Monsters are not of our world. Their abjectness makes them "other." They are not of the natural world and in some cases are supernatural. For Beal, monsters are the supernatural breaking into the natural world bringing with it all kinds of religious implications.

While one's first inclination might be to associate monsters with evil, Beal pushes back on this notion. Rather, one's emotional response and experience confronting a monster is like that of a religious experience. Beal refers to Rudolph Otto's idea of the Holy and the sublime to describe one's experience of monsters. "Both are often characterized as an encounter with

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[21] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, 20.

[22] Timothy K. Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters* (Routledge, 2001), 5.

[23] Stephen T. Asma, *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 13.

mysterious otherness that elicits a vertigo-like combination of both fear and desire, repulsion and attraction. Both religious experience and horror are characterized as encounters with something simultaneously awesome and awful a feeling captured in the older spelling, 'aweful' which still retains its sense of awe."[24] When Job encounters the divine in Job 38-42, he responds by covering himself in dust and ashes and exclaiming that he has seen things which he cannot comprehend. In YHWH's speech in the final chapters of Job, YHWH refers to monsters such as Leviathan and Behemoth, but it is ultimately YHWH who elicits the feelings of fear and awe in Job. For Job, YHWH is a monster.

In the ancient Near East, monsters were also representations of chaos. Beal refers to the *Enuma Elish* where Marduk kills the chaos god Tiamat in an epic battle. Marduk then tears her body into two and with it creates the universe. In a similar manner, in Genesis 1, YHWH creates the universe by creating order out of chaos. Thus, creation is order made from chaos. The creator gods conquered the chaos monsters to establish society. Monsters continue to oppose the structure, order, and laws of society. This is why they are abject. Nonetheless, Beal points out, everything is still made from chaos. "These chaos monster gods are part of a divinity that is deeply divided within itself about the future viability of the cosmos and of life as humankind knows it. Religion…is a locus for negotiating between the cosmic and the chaotic, which are, paradoxically, both interdependent and mutually exclusive."[25] For Beal, monsters are not strictly evil while gods are good. Rather, monsters are inherently tied to religion in an interdependent relationship. They represent chaos but also represent the divine breaking through the natural order of things in an awe-inspiring way.

[24] Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*, 7.
[25] Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters*, 22.

Timothy Beal's approach to religious monsters is picked up by Esther J. Hamori's 2023 book *God's Monsters: Vengeful Spirits, Deadly Angels, Hybrid Creatures, and Divine Hitmen of the Bible.* Hamori argues that the Bible is born out of a world of mythic traditions and fantastic lore spreading across the ancient Near East. From the giant serpent Tiamat of Babylon to the soul-eating dogs of Egypt, the ancient Levant found itself in a world of monsters. Hamori writes, "Every culture has its monster lore, and the world behind the Bible is no exception. If anything, it seems overrun with monsters. The Bible is a collection of texts from ancient Southwest Asia, and in literature from this region, as in Greek mythology, there are monsters spilling out the windows. From Canaan to Mesopotamia people wrote spectacular epics and poetic masterpieces about their gods – including the monstrous figures who served them, fought them, and ruled among them."[26] Hamori's purpose is to examine the monsters that fill the pages of the Bible and how they interact and serve YHWH.

Hamori is highly influenced by Noel Carroll and his definition of monsters. She looks at the traits of monsters such as magnification (giants), multiplication (an alarming amount of birds perched outside your home), hybridization (centaurs, satyrs, the Chimera), unnatural strength (tiny dolls throwing adults across a room), shapeshifting (angels, wendigo), etc. Hamori's understanding of monsters is also influenced by Kristeva's understanding of the abject. Monsters are those that are outside of society; they dwell in the liminal spaces on the boundaries of society. "Monsters usually dwell outside of human society, lurking in the liminal spaces and the places beyond, encountering people either when they break into human territory or when people

[26] Esther J. Hamori, *God's Monsters: Vengeful Spirits, Deadly Angels, Hybrid Creatures, and Divine Hitmen of the Bible* (Broadleaf Books, 2023), 2.

dare to enter those dangerous realms… If only the monsters would stay elsewhere and beyond. The problem is their propensity to break into this realm."[27]

The Bible is full of these monsters that break through the supernatural, leaving the heavenly dimension to invade ours. Most of these monsters work for YHWH in what Hamori calls God's Entourage. These monsters include: the Seraphim, the Cherubim the Adversary, the Destroyer and other Angels, various demons in God's ranks, and manipulative and mind-altering spirits. Perhaps surprisingly to the reader, these monsters are the scariest in the Bible. They are the harbingers of oncoming doom, bloodshed, and rampant disease, yet they work in the service of YHWH. "Every single type of divine being that is shown acting in the service of God in the Bible threatens, injures, tortures, or kills on his behalf. Some are exclusively violent, like the Destroyer. Others have multifaceted roles, like angels, who appear perfectly docile when performing one aspect of their job but create mass carnage when doing another.[28] Hamori then moves on to monsters that are not technically working for YHWH but can appear in the Bible: Leviathan, Shades, Ghosts, and other living dead, and giants. Finally, Hamori deals with which she calls the "monster of monsters," YHWH.[29] YHWH is a being of immense grandeur and power, dwelling in the Holy of Holies, kept off from the normal person. YHWH is giant, all powerful, omnipresent, at times amorphous.[30]

Despite Timothy Beal's (and later Hamori's) analysis of monsters in the Bible, biblical scholarship has largely ignored horror studies until 2008 when Amy Kalmanofsky published her dissertation, *Terror All Around: The Rhetoric of Horror in the Book of Jeremiah*. Kalmanofsky

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[27] Hamori, *God's Monsters*, 6.
[28] Hamori, *God's Monsters,* 8.
[29] Hamori, *God's Monsters,* 7.
[30] Hamori, *God's Monsters,* 265.

uses horror theory to examine rhetoric in the book of Jeremiah as a way to attract its readers. She writes, "Jeremiah employs a rhetoric of horror to engage, to horrify, and ultimately to reform Israel. The prophet does not want his audience to stop listening at the mention of unburied corpses. Instead, the selection of this particular image works to captivate his audience. The composite nature of horror, the fact that it terrifies and disgusts, repels and attracts, is key to its appeal and makes it a powerful tool for Jeremiah."[31] Kalmanofsky believes that the prophet uses horror rhetoric, not for entertainment value as we might expect from Stephen King, but to engage his readers on an emotional level.

Kalmanofsky is highly influenced by Noel Carroll's *Philosophy of Horror,* which describes horror as an occurrent emotion, an emotion that elicits both physical and cognitive reactions. In her study she divides horror into two categories: direct horror and indirect horror. Direct horror is the emotional response to actual danger. It is the horror one feels when they are confronted with a monster. Indirect horror is the reaction to the effects of horror. She argues that an onlooker passing by a ruined Jerusalem experiences indirect horror when viewing the corpses and remains of the ransacked city.

Kalmanofsky examines the verb חתת "to be dismayed" in her examination of direct horror in the book of Jeremiah.[32] She argues that חתת is closely connected to ירא.[33] The inherent relationship between fear and dismay is connected to feelings of powerlessness when confronted

[31] Amy Kalmanofsky, *Terror All Around: Horror, Monsters, and Theology in the Book of Jeremiah* (T&T Clark International, 2008), 11.

[32] Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, rev. by Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm (Brill, 2001), "חתת." This source will hereafter be referred to as *HALOT*.

[33] *HALOT*, "ירא."

by the dangers and threats in Jeremiah. "In a war context, for the defeated, the relationship between dismay and fear is clear. Aware of his weakness, a defeated warrior fears his enemy and feels dismay at his own weakness…Thus the root חתת, like shame, is a self-conscious emotion perhaps best understood as the awareness of one's own weakness and vulnerability."[34] For Kalmanofsky, dismay and shame are closely connected with fear.

She goes on to examine the image of the laboring woman in Jeremiah 6. Kalmanofsky connects this image to the mirroring effect of horror. We experience the same emotions of the protagonists in horror. We scream because the horror movie's final girl screams. Kalmanofsky argues that the laboring woman is Israel's final girl. Israel is to moan and scream at the prophet's message of incoming doom just as the laboring woman moans and writhes in pain. Yet it is not just the physical response that Jeremiah wants his readers to feel. "The prophets portrayed and perceived childbirth in terms of a woman's vulnerability, weakness, and helplessness. Persistent mention that labor 'seizes' and 'grips' a woman emphasizes her physical vulnerability…. The association of childbirth with vulnerability, weakness, and terror may reflect biblical Israel's world."[35] Hence, for Kalmanofsky, direct horror does not just elicit fear but also dismay. For her, dismay is the emotion of vulnerability and weakness in proximity to a very real impending threat of danger.

On the other hand, indirect horror is the emotional reaction to seeing the destruction brought on by direct horror. In her analysis of indirect horror, she examines the root שמם "to be appalled." While the exact meaning of the root is not quite clear, Kalmanofsky argues that it is best understood as a sense of revulsion, a pit in one's stomach when looking at the utter

[34] Kalmanofsky, *Terror All Around*, 18-19.
[35] Kalmanofsky, *Terror All Around*, 21-22.

destruction brought on by one's enemies. "It is the horror felt toward a horrific object - toward an object that has already suffered an attack. Either describing the devastated land and its people or describing the emotional response to that devastation, the root שמם and the related image of the shocked passers-by convey the perspective of indirect horror."[36] Using Kristeva's theory of the abject and Barbara Creed's monstrous-feminine, Kalmanofsky argues that there are three main images of indirect horror in Jeremiah: the incurable wound, corpses, and the maternal body. "Devastated Israel and the foreign nations are broken, sick entities, disintegrating like decomposing corpses. With bodies broken open, they are horrific monsters that both shame and terrify. Unlike the monsters of direct horror that come from outside and far away, indirect horror monsters threaten from within.[37] The images of death and destruction prove Hamori's description of YHWH as the monster of monsters correct. YHWH and the Heavenly Entourage are monsters that are not to be ignored or treated lightly. Kalmanofsky couples her ideas of indirect horror and direct horror in the rhetoric of Jeremiah to create a definition of horror in the Hebrew Bible. "Horror in the Bible is a composite emotional response of fear and shame to a threatening enemy."[38] While this definition is a good starting point, biblical scholarship ultimately expands beyond it.

This major expansion begins in 2018 with the publication of Brandon Grafius's dissertation as a book titled *Reading Phinehas, Watching Slashers: Horror Theory and Numbers 25*.[39] Like Kalmanofsky, Grafius utilizes horror theory, citing various horror films and literature

[36] Kalmanofsky, *Terror All Around*, 40
[37] Kalmanofsky *Terror All Around*, 72
[38] Kalmanofsky, *Terror All Around*, 41.
[39] Brandon Grafius, *Reading Phinehas, Watching Slashers: Horror Theory and Numbers 25* (Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018).

to make his argument. Grafius approaches Numbers 25, not just as a horror text, but also through the lens of a specific horror subgenre — the slasher film.

The slasher film is an extremely popular genre of horror films that found its progenitors in Italian *Giallo* films, Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 film *Psycho*, and Michael Powell's 1960 film *Peeping Tom*. The slasher film gained popularity in 1977 with John Carpenter's *Halloween*, which spun off into a decades-long franchise, inspiring other famous franchises such as the *Friday the 13th* series, the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series, *Child's Play, Candyman*, and the meta-satire *Scream* series. Its seemingly invincible stalkers, point-of-view shots, male gaze, and gratuitous gore mark the slasher genre. It has also inspired quite a bit of scholarship, most famously Carol Clover's seminal 1992 essay, "Her Body, Himself"[40] where Clover coined the term "the final girl."

Grafius builds his argument by examining the psychological nature of the slasher genre. He contends that in the 1960s there was a shift in the horror genre away from the outside monster to the monsters that already live among us. "Due to the convergence of thematic concerns and the loosening of censorship guidelines, most scholars consider the 'modern' horror film to begin in the late 1960s or early 1970s…. This period is marked by a turn toward seeing horror as emanating from within the family, rather than from without. Instead of the monster emerging as a threat from overseas, the threat emerges from within the structure of the family itself."[41] Specifically, it is the failings of the family structure that breed monsters. Grafius points to Robin

[40] Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, updated ed. (Princeton University Press, 2015), 21.

[41] Grafius, *Reading Phinehas, Watching Slashers,* 78.

Wood's "return of the repressed" as a way of understanding these films. For Wood, society represses violent and sexual instincts. This is, in fact, a good thing.

However, Wood goes on to identify surplus repression in our culture. Surplus repression is where people are conditioned to take on specific roles in our culture. These are primarily sexual in nature, such as the repression of sexual energy, bisexuality, and female sexuality. Grafius couples Wood with Kristeva. In traditional psychoanalytic approaches, children must overcome their mothers during their development. Kristeva introduces a third figure in the child's development: that of "the imaginary father." This figure guides the child from the mother into the Symbolic order. If the child does not make the journey from the maternal semiotic order into the paternal Symbolic order, then they risk being consumed by the mother. This failure of the family plagues slasher films of the 70s and 80s. The murders become sexually repressed monsters who inflict carnage on unsuspecting teenagers who partake in sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll.

Carol Clover's work, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* closely examines the workings of the slasher film. Slasher films seemingly follow a standard formula where, one-by-one, characters fall victim to the killer until one character remains. This character is almost always a female and almost always a virgin.[42] "[The Final Girl] is the Girl Scout, the book worm, the mechanic. Unlike her girlfriends, she is not sexually active…She is watchful to the point of paranoia; small signs of danger that her friends ignore, she registers. Above all she is intelligent and resourceful in a pinch."[43] The final Girl is distinguished from the other girls in the film. Her sexuality is repressed which builds a connection between her and the killer.

[42] There are exceptions to this rule, but the exceptions are often trying to subvert the norms established by the early slasher films.

[43] Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, 39.

Clover goes on, "The Final Girl is, on reflection, a congenial double for the adolescent male. She is feminine enough to act out in a gratifying way, a way unapproved for adult males, the terrors and masochistic pleasures of the underlying fantasy, but not so feminine as to disturb the structures of male competence and sexuality."[44] By the end of the film, the Final Girl is covered in dirt and blood, any feminine qualities have long disappeared. She has stopped running and turned to the killer to face him. She uses a knife, or chainsaw, or some other phallic weapon to penetrate the killer symbolically, releasing her sexual frustration and dispatching the killer.

Grafius argues that the slasher films of the late 70s and 80s were a response to the conservative culture in power. The sexually frustrated killer is destroying those who embrace sexuality and counter-cultural movements. They engage in sex, they do drugs, they listen to rock-and-roll. Grafius argues that Numbers 25 responds similarly to its cultural situation, namely Moses' failure as a leader with Baal of Peor and at Kadesh. Further, Grafius points to the psychoanalytic readings of Moses and his own marriage to a Midianite woman. "In both cases, Numbers 25 and the slasher film, the social order has experienced a breakdown. In each case, the repressive structures- the family, Moses- were not enough to ensure a well-ordered system. In each case, the response is violence, specifically a violence that arises from within the repressive structure itself, from a course outside of the central authority."[45] Thus, Phinehas received the Aaronide priesthood to reestablish boundaries within the Israelite camp.

Grafius expands on how horror theory can be used to read the Bible in his 2020 book *Reading the Bible with Horror*. In this book, Grafius lays out several examples of horror in the Hebrew Bible and uses horror theory to approach these texts. Grafius points to the extreme

[44] Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, 51.
[45] Brandon Grafius, *Reading Phinehas, Watching Slashers*, 118.

violence that is prevalent throughout the Bible and laments that some textual readings do not know how to approach these texts. "As soon as a text produces discomfort, it can be dismissed as a text borne out of violence and then talked back to before it has actually been heard. Reading these texts through the lens of horror starts with this process of listening. For the most horrifying texts often reveal the fears and anxieties of the individuals and the culture that produced them."[46] For Grafius, reading the Bible through a horror lens reveals the anxieties and fears of the culture that produced the text. It is a way to approach texts that have often been ignored or maligned as violence.

Grafius uses Monster Theory to look at Leviathan and Behemoth at the end of Job. He then uses the idea of ghosts, Derrida's idea of hauntology, and how words can haunt us. He looks at how words such as *Elohim* contain the ghosts of former gods from Israel's early religious history. He also looks at haunted spaces and describes the house of David as being a haunted space. Every king is compared to King David throughout Kings and Chronicles, yet the House of David is haunted by David's own sins. Grafius finishes the book by arguing the Bible depicts YHWH as a chaos Monster. YHWH is behind the flood in Genesis and the plagues in Exodus. Following Kalmanofsky, YHWH elicits fear and disgust in the Deity's enemies. Yet, for Grafius, this is a beautiful portrayal. "The monstrous portrayal of God leads us to a place similar to horror films of cosmic dread…While the Hebrew Bible tempers this frightening portrayal of YHWH with much that is kind and loving, the monstrous still lurks beneath the surface, teeming through all of our interactions with the divine."[47] Horror allows the reader to let the Bible speak for itself. The portrayal of its characters, ethics, and Deity is complicated. Horror accepts that notion.

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[46] Brandon Grafius, *Reading the Bible with Horror* (Lexington Books-Fortress Press, 2018), 6

[47] Grafius, *Reading the Bible with Horror*, 138.

Finally, in his 2021 essay "Horror and Bible (Six Theses),"[48] Grafius attempts to go further than Kalmanofsky's definition of horror in the Bible by laying the framework for six thesis statements. Clearly influenced by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's essay, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," Grafius suggests that the Bible is clearly full of horror and monsters. Yet the use of horror theory in biblical scholarship has largely been ignored until recently. While horror theory is gaining traction, it is still mostly a fringe discipline. Grafius sees its potential as a method and offers the following theses as a foundation:

1. Thesis 1: Horror Reveals Anxiety
2. Thesis 2: Culture Helps to Shape the Particular Form of Our Anxieties
3. Thesis 3: Horror is Used for Many Different Purposes
4. Thesis 4: Broad Definitions of Horror Are More Productive than Narrow Ones
5. Thesis 5: Find the Connections, Then Argue For Them
6. Thesis 6: Hope and Fear Exist in a Dialectical Relationship

Grafius' first two thesis statements are connected. I have argued that much of horror theory is built on the assumption that horror reflects the anxieties of one's culture. In order to understand a horror story, it is important to also understand its *Sitz im Leben*. The giant monster movies of the 50-s make more sense when read in connection with society's fear of nuclear fallout. The brutal violence of the 70s Grindhouse films makes more sense in relation to societies' response to the Vietnam War. Grafius suggests that just as horror writers use their cultural context and social anxieties to shine light of what their culture represses, biblical authors also expressed their own anxieties through horror. For Grafius, the same horror that is found in the Bible is often found in

[48] Brandon Grafius, "Bible and Horror (Six Theses)" in Joseph Laycock and Natasha Mickles, eds., *Religion, Culture, and the Monstrous: Of Gods and Monsters* (Lexington Press, 2021), 29-39.

contemporary works of horror. Stories of rape, murder, and evil dwelling in the wilderness are found throughout the Hebrew Bible. If we can understand how contemporary scholars understand contemporary horror, then perhaps we can use these same methods to understand ancient Biblical horror. "Many of the anxieties that are found in the Hebrew Bible are also reflected in contemporary horror films; discussing the Bible in conjunction with contemporary horror films can help to shed light on these anxieties and reveal them in more depth."[49] Grafius does warn that we should be careful not to equate the two cultural contexts. He comments that we should focus on the dissimilarities as much as the similarities.

Next, Grafius points out that horror is used for many different purposes. Horror can be used to demonize foreigners or enemies.[50] It can be used to shine light on the repressed in one's society, or it can be used to critique social or political ideologies. Grafius comments on the countless subgenres in horror and how they are used in different contexts. Each subgenre has its own formulas and rules. While all are distinctly horror, different subgenres will utilize horror in different ways. I believe that understanding different subgenres of horror and how they relate in the Bible opens the door for more fruitful scholarship. With that said, Grafius's fourth thesis argues that it is important to keep definitions of horror broad. "The purpose of these studies should be to make creative connections, to uncover meanings in the text that may be lying dormant, and to place these texts in conversation with our own culture. Horror can provide a bridge for doing that, as it offers us a template of concepts, narrative structure, and vocabulary that we can apply to the

[49] Grafius, "Horror and Bible (Six Theses)," 34.

[50] Safwat Marzouk's dissertation uses monster theory to explore how the book of Ezekiel portrays Egypt as monsters. Safwar Marzouk, *Forschungen Zum Alten Testament 2. Reihe, Volume 76 : Egypt as a Monster in the Book of Ezekiel.* (Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

biblical text."[51] Grafius adds that the purpose is not to argue if a biblical text is horror or not but how can horror help us understand a text better.

Grafius ends by suggesting that hope and fear are in a dialectical relationship. He argues that horror focuses on our fears while religion, ideally, focuses on our hopes. Horror and religion function in similar ways to answer similar metaphysical questions. "They are both attempts to explore our deepest questions about our role in the universe, our relationship to the unseen order, how we should treat each other, and how we should live in the world. And those connections, on their own, are enough to make approaching the Bible through the lens of horror an intriguing task."[52] While biblical scholars have largely ignored horror as a lens, it seems that the two are much more of a natural partner to each other than one might think.

This dissertation builds from the foundation laid by Brandon Grafius whose own foundations lay on top of a century of psychoanalytic and sociological approaches to Horror Studies. The purpose of this dissertation is influenced by Grafius' fourth and fifth thesis.[53] The goal is not to prove that 2 Sam 13 is a horror story but rather to put 2 Sam 13 in conversation with horror. Through this conversation we can shine light on the cultural fears of ancient Israel highlighted in this text.

These fears are about the treatment of women, especially the victims of rape, and how the culture and laws of ancient Israel perpetuated a rape culture. Second Samuel 13 is critiquing this rape culture by pointing out the horror that even women of the royal house are subject to experiencing. By placing 2 Sam 13 in conversation with horror, we see how the author connects

[51] Grafius, "Bible and Horror (Six Theses)," 35.
[52] Grafius, "Bible and Horror (Six Theses)," 37.
[53] Grafius, "Horror and Bible (Six Theses)," 34.

the reader with the emotions of the characters. The reader feels the fear and disgust of Tamar when Amnon seizes her and screams with her when Amnon banishes her from his house. Just as Robin Wood has argued that the American Horror Film reflects the fears and anxieties of America; 2 Sam 13 reflects the fears and anxieties of ancient Isreal.[54] For if even the daughter of the King can be raped and left a desolate woman, then what hope is there for the other woman of ancient Israel?

This dissertation puts 2 Sam 13 in conversation with the ideas explored by Kristeva, Carroll, Clover, Creed, Kalmanofsky, and Grafius to examine how the text builds tension to raise terror and fear, to identify the monster, to horrify the audience, to cause the audience to scream, and to subvert the audience's own expectations of bloodlust. The text uses these ideas to drive the point about the rape culture in the author's society and cause the audience to confront their own fears.

[54] Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film."

Chapter 3: 2 Samuel 13:1-11

A Critical Analysis of 2 Samuel 13:1-11

1. After some time had passed, Absalom, son of David, had a beautiful sister and her name was Tamar.[1] Amnon, son of David, loved her.
2. Amnon was so worried that he made himself sick because Tamar, his sister, was a virgin and it seemed impossible in Amnon's eyes to do anything to her.
3. Amnon had a friend and his name was Jonadab, son of Shimeah, who was David's brother. Jonadab was a very clever man.
4. Jonadab said to Amnon, "Why are you weak like this, oh son of the King, morning after morning. Will you not tell me? Amnon said to him "I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister."
5. Jonadab said to him, "Lie down on your bed and pretend to be sick." Your father will come to see you, and you will say to him, 'Please bring Tamar, my sister, and she will feed me bread, and she will make the food in my sight. I will watch and I will eat from her hand."
6. Amnon laid down and pretended to be sick. The king came to see him and Amnon said to the king, "Please bring Tamar, my sister, and she will bake two cakes while I watch, and I will eat from her hands."
7. David sent home to Tamar saying, "Please go to the house of Amnon, your brother, and make him food."
8. Tamar went to the house of Amnon, her brother. He was laying down. She took dough, kneaded it, and made it into cakes while he was watching. She baked the cakes.

[1] All Hebrew translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

9. She took the pan and placed it before him, but he refused to eat. Amnon said, “Send everyone out away from me.” So, everyone left him.
10. Amnon said to Tamar, “Bring the food to my bedroom and I will eat from your hand.” Tamar took the cakes which she made, and she brought them to Amnon, her brother, into his bedroom.
11. But when she drew near to feed him, he seized her and said to her, “Come, lie with me, my sister.”

2 Samuel 13 recounts the rape of David’s daughter by her half-brother, Amnon. The story is situated after the prophet Nathan’s confrontation with King David concerning the murder of Uriah and the stealing of Uriah’s wife, Bathsheba. Chapter 13 begins the long succession narrative of King David’s heir.[2] While Solomon is nowhere mentioned in this chapter, the events herewith explain the crumbling of David’s family structure. Chapter 13 deals with Amnon, David’s eldest son, and Absalom, David’s third son.[3] Morrison notes that Chileab, David’s second-oldest son, is only mentioned in 2 Sam 3:2. “David’s second son, Chileab, receives only a birth notice and is never mentioned again. If he is presumed dead, or incapable of assuming the throne, then the main characters in this story are the two eldest sons in line to the throne.”[4] This chapter ends with the death of Amnon and Absalom seeking exile believing his father will kill him.

I have split the passage into three distinct sections based on how I see the narrative: vs. 1-

[2] The Succession Narrative views 2 Samuel 9-20 and 1 Kings 1-2 as a cohesive narrative about who will take the throne of David after his death. Leonhard Rost originally popularized this view in 1926. See Rost, *The Succession of the Throne of David*.

[3] 2 Samuel 3:2-3 establishes this birth order. “Sons were born to David at Hebron: his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam of Jezreel; his second was Chileab, of Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel; the third was Absalom son of Maacah, daughter of King Talmai of Geshur.”

[4] Morrison, *2 Samuel*, 168.

11, vs. 12-22, and vs. 23-39. The first section includes the first of what Carroll calls the onset of the story leading to the moment that our heroine discovers the existence of the monster. The section covers Tamar arguing with Amnon until the parashah after verse 22. The third section covers verse 23 through the end of the chapter.

This chapter will focus on the first section which I argue acts as the onset of the story. In this section we are introduced to several characters, learn their intentions, and see Jonadab and Amnon's plan set into action. This section is marked by the building of suspense throughout the 11 verses ultimately leading to the horror of v. 11 when Amnon throws off his ruse and seizes Tamar. Suspense becomes tangible and terror manifests into horror.

Verse 1 begins sometime after the events of the previous chapter. We are introduced to three names: Absalom, Tamar, and Amnon. Absalom and Tamar are brother and sister and Amnon is their half-brother. Amnon is in love with Tamar.[5] His infatuation with his half-sister vexes him so much that he makes himself sick. Amnon's friend and cousin, Jonadab, comes to Amnon to comfort him. Amnon explains that he is so weak because he is in love with Tamar and yet there is nothing, he can do about it. Jonadab, being a crafty man, devises a plan to get Amnon in close proximity to Tamar. Jonadab tells Amnon to pretend to be sick and when David comes to check on him, asks the king to send Tamar so that she will cook for him and feed Amnon by her hand. Amnon agrees to this plan and asks his father to send Tamar, his sister, to come and bake cakes for him while he watches her. David sends Tamar and she grabs the dough, kneads the dough, forms the dough into cakes, bakes the cakes, places them on a tray, and places it in front of Amnon; all while Amnon is watching her. Amnon refuses the cakes and in a moment

[5] At least he believes he is in love with her. Amnon certainly expresses lust towards her though his actions after he rapes her will prove that his love was never truly what we would call love.

that certainly unsettles Tamar, sends out everyone else from his house. He then tells Tamar to bring the cakes into his inner chamber. Tamar complies but when she does, Amnon seizes her and asks her to lie with him.

Verse 1 begins with the phrase ויהי אחרי-כן. The phrase literally means "and it was after this." The NSRV renders the phrase as "some time passed." Morrison agrees with the NRSV's translation here and in 2 Sam 8:1, noting that the phrase "indicates that an unspecified period of time has passed since God's promise to David in the previous episode."[6] While the phrase certainly indicates that time has passed, it does not want us to separate the events of chapter 13 from the events of the previous chapter.

Chapter 12:1-15 recounts Nathan's confrontation with King David on account of David's murder of Uriah and stealing of Bathsheba. Nathan condemns David saying, "Now, therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the LORD: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house, and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in broad daylight" (2 Sam 12:10-11). This prophecy will prove correct in the following chapters culminating in Absalom's open rebellion against his father. Absalom, himself, will rape David's פלגשי in 2 Sam 16:22.

Frank Yamada describes the connection between chapters 12 and 13: "Within the context of prophetic judgment, this scene points to the fulfillment of Nathan's oracle. David's house will divide against itself with brother killing brother and son rebelling against father. The precipitating event, the rape of Tamar, suggests how love and hate are intermingled in the royal family."[7] This perspective of interpreting chapter 13 has led to a focus, not of Tamar, but rather

[6] Morrison, *2 Samuel*, 168.
[7] Yamada, *Configurations of Rape in the Hebrew Bible,* 107.

the men in the story. Interpreters have approached this text with Tamar's rape as incidental to the story at large.

This point is underscored by the word order of v.1. ויהי אהרי-כן ולאבשלום בן דוד אחות יפה ושמה תמר ויאהבה אמנון בן-דוד. The first name mentioned in the verse is Absalom, prioritizing him over the other characters despite him not appearing in the passage again until v. 20. The irony is not lost on Graybill. She writes, "The story of Tamar's rape is narrated in a way that makes it fundamentally a story about men. Tamar is secondary, even in the account of her own rape. And for these men, the aftermath of the rape is messy. Indeed, the rape itself is at once central to the narrative and secondary to it; it is not Tamar, the raped daughter, but Absalom, the wronged brother and beloved son, who is the emotional focus of the passage."[8] It would be easy for cynical readers to believe the text only values Tamar as property of her father and brothers.

Adding to this point is that the first half of the chapter is seen through Amnon's perspective. While Absalom is the first name given in the chapter, the audience sees the events play out from Amnon's perspective. The reader is given insight into Amnon's inner thoughts in v. 2. Amnon's major conflict is the center of the first 11 verses. Further, the phrase בעיני אמנון is repeated four times in the first 8 verses of the chapter.[9] We see Jonadab's plan set into action through the eyes of Amnon. Yet I do not think this makes Tamar a secondary character in her own rape account. I believe viewing this through a horror lens emphasizes Tamar as a primary character and makes us scared for her safety as Amnon's schemes come to fruition.

Another point of note for the present pericope is the repeated use of familial language throughout the eleven verses. Son is used four times, brother is used five times, and sister is used

[8] Graybill, *Texts After Terror,* 43.
[9] 2 Samuel 13:2, 5, 6, 8.

six times in this opening section. There are several reasons for the text's emphasis on the familial nature of this text. As argued above, this text keeps Nathan's curse in the back of the audience's mind. This text is about the succession of King David's heir. The characters found within this narrative are intimately tied to how they are to succeed David while also setting up the events that lead to Absalom's rebellion.

Verse 1 opens introducing the readers to Absalom, the son of David, and Tamar, his beautiful sister. Then we are introduced to Amnon who is also a son of David. Tamar is the daughter of Maacah and Absalom's full sister, making Amnon her half-brother.

However, this distinction is not immediately made in the text. In v. 2, Amnon makes himself sick on account of "Tamar, his sister." It is Amnon who insists on differentiating the two in v. 4 when he refers to Tamar as "תמר אחות אבשלם אחי." Amnon is quick to downplay Tamar as his sister but rather his brother's sister. Jonadab (which the text makes sure to mention is the son of Shimeah, brother of David; making him Amnon, Absalom, and Tamar's cousin) does not make the same distinction. In v. 5, Jonadab tells Amnon to call his dad and ask him to send Tamar, his sister, to him. Amnon complies with Jonadab's suggestion in v. 6. In v. 7, David tells Tamar to go to the house of Amnon "your brother." This phrase is actualized in v. 8. In v. 10, Tamar brings the cakes that she made to Amnon, her brother. Finally, in v. 11, Amnon refers to Tamar as "my sister" after he seizes her.

The plethora of familial language that populates chapter 13 centralizes a major theme of the passage. This is a family affair. The House of David is, in fact, a house of horror. It is clear to the modern reader the inappropriateness of a brother lusting after his half-sister. There is no word for "half-sister" or "half-brother" in Hebrew. The text does not differentiate between the half siblings and full siblings. In fact, Leviticus 18:11 comments that one's half-sister is still one's

sister. “You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s wife’s daughter, born in your father’s house, since she is sister.”[10] In the context of 2 Sam 13, the verse may read “Amnon shall not uncover the nakedness of his father’s, David, wife’s, Maacah,[11] daughter, Tamar, born in David’s house, since Tamar is Amnon’s sister.”

However, several scholars have suggested that incest was not a concern in the text. Morrison suggests that we should not read modern taboos back into the text. “The modern reader waits for the narrator to raise the question of incest, but he never does… The text can raise contemporary questions that were outside the narrator’s purview.”[12] Rather Morrison points to v. 13 where Tamar assures Amnon that King David would not withhold Tamar from her brother.

This brings to question how Morrison and Walsh deal with v. 2. “Amnon was so worried that he made himself sick because Tamar, his sister, was a virgin and it seemed impossible in Amnon’s eyes to do anything to her.” Why is Amnon so worried that he makes himself become sick over his interest in Tamar? Is it because she is his sister or is it because she is a *betulah*? Morrison focuses on *betulah*, defining the term as an unmarried virgin.

> The Hebrew term *betulah* can refer to a woman who has never had sexual relations or to an unmarried woman. In this episode the former meaning is intended since after the rape Tamar loses her status as a royal ‘virgin’ daughter, though she remains unmarried. The narrator presumes that we understand that the virgin daughters of the king were protected from unsolicited advances from men, including their brothers and half-brothers.[13]

For Morrison, the issue is not that Tamar is Amnon’s sister but because she is a virgin under the protection of Absalom, Amnon’s political rival.

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[10] Leviticus 18:11.

[11] 2 Sam 3:3 names Maacah as the mother of Absalom.

[12] Morrison, *2 Samuel*, 169.

[13] Morrison, *2 Samuel*, 169.

Morrison takes this point further and argues that אהב in this context should not be translated as love but rather a form of lust. If Amnon truly loved Tamar, then he would be jumping at the idea of marrying her. Yet this does not occur to either Amnon or Jonadab. "For this reason, the ordinary translation 'to love' for the Hebrew verb *'hb* in 13:2 and elsewhere in this story is hardly appropriate. Amnon does not 'love' Tamar. She is a beautiful woman and he desires her, or, better, he is fixated on her, infatuated with her, and lusting after her."[14] For Morrison, Amnon is worried sick because he wants to have sex with Tamar, not because marrying her is forbidden.

Sibling incest is forbidden under the Torah. Leviticus 18:9 reads, "The nakedness of your sister, the daughter of your father or the daughter of your mother, whether she was born at home or she was born outside. You should not uncover their nakedness. Deuteronomy 27:22 states "Cursed is the one who lies with his sister: the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother. All the people will say 'Amen.'"

Calum M. Carmichael argues in *Sex and Religion in the Bible* that the law forbids incest precisely because of the narrative traditions of ancient Israel. "There is a direct link between patriarchal sexual conduct and the presentation of the incest rules in Leviticus 18 and 20. The reason for the link is that the lawgivers disapproved of what they found in some of their nation's traditions because the narratives condoned relationships that the lawgiver judged to be incestuous."[15] Thus, according to Carmichael, Amnon is not worried sick because his desire is incestuous, but rather incest is bad because of Amnon's desire for his sister. "One major reason for the existence of some incest rules is to ensure that family life is as sexually unimpassioned as

[14] Morrison, *2 Samuel*, 169-70.

[15] Calum M. Carmichael, *Sex and Religion in the Bible* (Yale University Press, 2010), 139.

possible. If it is not, violence of the kind that Absalom has inflicted on Amnon is the likely outcome."[16] The lawgivers looked at how incest worked out in their narrative traditions and decided it was best if Israel condemned incest rather than supported it.

Yamada also questions incest as the key issue keeping Amnon from Tamar. Rather, Yamada focuses on the issue of Amnon's access to Tamar. Yamada suggests that the reading of v. 2 might indicate that Amnon is distressed because it is impossible to do anything to Tamar because she is a *betulah* and under the protection of her brother, *àla* Morrison. However, Yamada points out that the narrative contradicts this idea because Amnon easily gets access to her through David, their father.[17] Yamada diverges and suggests that it is impossible for Amnon to get access to Tamar not because she is a virgin, but rather because she is Absalom's sister. Yamada's emphasis here is not that Tamar is Amnon's sister (thus incest) but because Tamar is Absalom's sister (thus an issue of politics).

> Amnon sees it as impossible to do anything about his feelings because of Tamar's relationship to others within the family, namely, her blood-ties to Absalom. Since Absalom and Amnon are rival successors to the throne, Amnon's 'love' for Tamar is all the more complicated, if not impossible… Any action directed at Tamar will produce a reaction from his brother Absalom, especially when situated within the complex and competitive issues of royal succession.[18]

Thus, it is not Amnon's relationship with his sister but Tamar's relationship with Absalom that complicates the issue.

While I do see some benefit to these arguments, I remain unconvinced. The strongest argument for the dismissal of incest is in v. 13 where Tamar suggests that King David would not

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[16] Carmichael, *Sex and Religion in the Bible*, 139.

[17] While Yamada is correct in pointing out how easy it is for Amnon to get access. It should be noted that this is precisely the focus of Jonadab's plan. If it were so easy for Amnon to get access, then why does he need a plan to accomplish it?

[18] Yamada, *Configurations of Rape in the Hebrew Bible*, 109-10.

withhold her from Amnon. However, this is complicated. Tamar is trying to convince her predator not to rape her. Further, David is king. 2 Samuel 11 has shown that David has no qualms overruling the laws of sexual morality. Marvin Sweeney points out David's previous relationship with sexual ethics: "It is not clear that incest is the primary issue to a man who has no trouble committing adultery with the wife of one of his trusted soldiers."[19] Yamada's argument that the issue at hand is with Absalom and the overall central theme of succession is supported by the central themes of the passage.

However, we cannot ignore the individual horrors of this story by just focusing on the succession nature of the text. The text does not just refer to Tamar as Absalom's sister but also as Amnon's. Tamar is called Amnon's sister in v. 2 before she is called a *betulah* or beautiful. Amnon's rape is not just a violation against his father and his brother. It is a violation against his sister. Tamar is very much Amnon's sister. She comes to his aid because she is his sister. She kneads the dough because she is Amnon's sister. She bakes the cakes because she is Amnon's sister. She brings the cakes to Amnon to feed him precisely because she is his sister. And yet Amnon still violates this bond. Amnon is a monster.

2 Samuel 13:1-11 as Horror

Second Samuel 13:1-11 recounts the story of King David's son who is in love (or in lust to follow Morrison) with his half-sister, Tamar. With the help of his cousin, Jonadab, he concocts a scheme to draw Tamar into his inner bedroom where he will be able to seize and rape her. While the initial section of the story is only 11 verses, it is full of tension for the reader. The reader is aware of the unfolding horror from the beginning of the story and the reader is unable to

[19] Marvin A. Sweeney, *1-2 Samuel*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 255.

warn Tamar of the trap that Amnon and Jonadab have laid before her. The text lays out exactly what is at stake and what dangers lie ahead of Tamar. The reader is let in on Jonadab's scheme from the beginning and thus the tension builds throughout the story as we see the horrors unfold. We watch with tension as Tamar comes into Amnon's lair. We feel his eyes staring at her as she places the dough, kneads the dough, forms it into cakes, and bakes the dough (2 Sam. 13:8-9). All of this is done while Amnon is watching her. The reader feels the tension building when Amnon commands everyone to leave his house except for Tamar. The reader pleads for Tamar not to go in there when Amnon tells her to bring the cakes into his bedroom. The reader screams when Amnon abandons his deception and seizes Tamar. Amnon's horror manifests before us.

In "The Philosophy of Horror: Or Paradoxes of the Heart," Noel Carroll describes the common plot structure of monster stories. He refers to this as "the complex-discovery plot."[20] This plot structure consists of the onset, discovery, confirmation, and confrontation. 2 Samuel 13 does not naturally fit into Carroll's plot structure. However, understanding the onset clarifies the tension that the narrator in 2 Samuel 13 is building. The onset is a scene at the beginning of a monster story that introduces the audience to the monster before any main characters are aware of impending danger. In the 1975 movie *Jaws*, the onset occurs at the opening of the film when two teenagers go skinny-dipping into the ocean at night.[21] The titular shark attacks the teens, dispatching them with relative ease. This scene's sole purpose is to introduce the audience to the monster. Carroll writes, "The audience has more pieces of the puzzle than do the characters, which perspective results in the audience coming to its discovery in advance of the characters,

[20] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror,* 101.

[21] "Opening Scene," *Jaws*, directed by Steven Spielberg (Universal Pictures, 1975), Streaming on Netflix.

and, thereby, elicits a keen sense of expectation from the reader or the viewer."[22] The omniscient audience is fully aware of the danger that our heroes are in, yet we have no ability to warn them. Thus, creating true horror in the audience. We are left to watch as the events inevitably unfold.

It must be noted that 2 Samuel 13:1-6 is not an onset as Carroll describes it. The onset usually consists of meaningless, throwaway characters being devoured by the monster at hand. No one is killed or attacked in the first six verses of chapter 13 and Tamar is far from a meaningless character. The purpose of noting Carroll's onset is to emphasize the narrator's purpose in describing the emotions of the monster. The narrator is telling the audience that Amnon is a monster, even before he acts.

Perhaps a stronger analogy is Norman Bates in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960).[23] The audience meets Norman Bates along with Marion Crane. While Norman is quite strange and seems to have a peculiar relationship with his off-screen mother, this is no reason to assume that he is truly evil. That is, until Hitchcock reveals Norman Bates's ulterior nature. After the dinner scene between Norman and Marion, Marion returns to her hotel room for the night. The camera then shows Norman walking over to a picture, removing it from the wall to reveal a peephole with a sight line straight into Marion's room. Norman gazes through the peephole and watches Marion as she undresses. The audience is now fully aware that Norman is not the kind, albeit weird, innkeeper, but a criminal. In the same way, the initial stage of 2 Samuel 13 reveals the sexual nature of Amnon's malicious intent.

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[22] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 100.

[23] "Peephole Scene," *Psycho*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock (1960; Universal Studios Home Video, 1999), DVD.

Interestingly, Carroll does not consider *Psycho* a horror film because Norman Bates is not a true monster, though he does fit Carroll's definition of art-horror.[24] Carroll understands art-horror as containing a monster that is both threatening (inducing fear) and impure (inducing disgust). Carroll concedes, "That a madman with a butcher knife is threatening needs no comment. But, as well, Norman Bates, in virtue of his psychosis, resembles the impure beings at the core of the concept of art-horror."[25] Carroll admits that his decision not to include *Psycho* as a horror film is "a matter of decision."[26] Contrary to Carroll's analysis, Cosimo Urbano notes Carroll's own blindness in listing every reason why *Psycho* is a horror movie and then stating that it is not because Norman Bates is not a traditional monster. Urbano then concludes that it is not the presence of monsters that categorizes something as a horror story, but the feeling that the story induces. "At the core of my argument, therefore, lies the idea that what is characteristic of, and necessary to, the modern horror film is neither its monsters nor its typical narrative patterns, but rather a specific spectatorial affect, namely anxiety."[27] In a similar vein, Steven Jay Schneider argues that Norman Bates of *Psycho* and Mark of *Peeping Tom* represent their own kind of monster. "In both films the monster is human, all too human, and besides that, all too real. Real in the sense that no obvious or expressionistically rendered signifiers of physical deformity are made available to the audience/protagonist/victim for the purpose of immediate identification."[28] Amnon is this sort of monster. On the outside he is seemingly normal. But his

[24] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 38.
[25] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 39.
[26] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 39.
[27] Cosimo Urbano, "What's the Matter with Melanie? Reflections on the Merits of Psychoanalytic Approaches to Modern Horror Cinema," in *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud's Worst Nightmare*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 25.
[28] Steven Jay Schneider, "Murder as Art/The Art of Murder: Aestheticizing Violence in Modern Cinematic Horror," in *Dark Thoughts: Philosophic Reflections On Cinematic Horror*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider and Daniel Shaw (Scarecrow Press, 2003), 178.

innermost feelings distress him, turning his stomach, making himself sick, until he must give into his monstrous nature.

This debate shines light onto the status of 2 Samuel 13 as a horror story. Norman Bates and Amnon are quite similar. Their inner turmoil pushes them to move beyond social taboos into the realm of violence. Amnon is threatening and capable of inducing fear. His psychotic state that makes himself sick indicates the impure being of Carroll's monsters. Further, the narrator clues in the audience of Amnon's plan to induce anxiety. In this scene the audience is introduced to not only the characters but the dangers at hand. Even if incest is not an issue for the original audience, (as Morrison and Yamada argue), Amnon's lust is carnivorous. To Morrison's point, neither Amnon nor Jonadab has marital intentions for Tamar. Amnon is driven mad by Tamar's carnal flesh, not his love for her.[29]

The second scene describes Amnon's plan in motion. The audience has already heard Jonadab's plan. Verse 7 indicates that Amnon's plea to his father David was successful. David sends Tamar to Amnon's house in order to make cakes for her sick brother. The scene slowly unfolds, repeating much of what was already described in the first scene, only now the plan is coming to fruition. Tamar goes to Amnon's house; she takes the dough, kneads it, makes the cakes, bakes the cake, puts them on a pan, and sets them before Amnon. Amnon refuses to eat the cakes. He sends out everyone from the house. Everyone leaves the house. He tells Tamar to bring the cakes into his bedchamber. Tamar takes the cakes into the bedchamber. He then grabs her and asks her to lie with him. The scene is slow and detailed. The narrator takes the time to describe every action that each character does. This technique builds the tension of the scene.

[29] I deal with Morrison's argument above. See Morrison, *2 Samuel*, 168-70.

The audience is aware of the danger that Tamar is in, even if she has not realized it herself. Still, the audience must endure the long, building tension as the verses develop.

Terror is the anticipation of horror. Terror describes the feeling of anxiety and dread that builds as a scene develops when the audience knows something is going to happen but doesn't know when or how. Imagine Van Helsing in a long, dark hallway in a gothic castle, with doors on either side of the hallway. The audience and Van Helsing sense that danger may lurk behind any of these doors. At the opposite end of the hallway, a door is opened ajar with a strange noise singing out. Van Helsing must investigate the noise, so he slowly proceeds down the hallway towards the open door. The tension builds as Van Helsing passes each door leaving himself vulnerable to anything that might pop out. He takes another step forward closer to the end of the corridor. A door suddenly swings open and Count Dracula appears displaying his sharp teeth, pouncing towards our hero. Terror is Van Helsing walking down the hallway while horror is Dracula appearing. In other words, horror is terror manifesting into the material.

2 Samuel 13:7-10 utilizes terror to build the tension as Tamar slowly takes the dough, kneads the dough, bakes the cakes, and places the cakes before Amnon, all while Amnon is watching her. The tension builds as Amnon sends away everyone in the house (anyone capable of protecting Tamar) and Amnon orders Tamar to bring the cakes into his bedchamber. Note the imperative is used in v. 10 contrasting the use of the particle of entreaty in v. 6 when Amnon asks David to send Tamar to his house. In v. 6, Amnon portrays himself as a sick and weak son. Any protection that a *betulah* may have had is gone, Amnon is free to show his true nature. He orders Tamar to bring the cakes into his bedchamber. The tension is now boiling over, and the audience is tempted to yell "no, don't go in there!" Nevertheless, the audience has no voice. The

audience is helpless. The horror manifests in v. 11, Amnon seizes his victim, showing his sickness was merely a facade. The monster appears.

The narrator's use of repetition is key to the building of terror in the scene. Sigmund Freud describes this phenomenon as "the uncanny." Freud recounts a story of when he was on a trip in Italy.[30] He had ventured out on his lonesome when he made a wrong turn and found himself on a street, which he deemed unfavorable. He turned down the next alley and followed another turn only to find himself once again on that street. He continued down another alley, which led back to the same street. As he appeared again, people noticed him and gave him strange looks. He began to feel a sense of uneasiness that only built and did not dissipate until he finally found his way back to the plaza where he began his journey.

The uncanny is something that by all accounts appears normal, but something seems off. If one has ever walked down a hallway, which they have walked down a thousand times, but now the hallways are empty and the lights are flickering, there is a sense of uneasiness. Further, Freud notes that a common occurrence, such as checking one's coat and receiving a ticket number 62, is barely noteworthy. If one were then to encounter the number 62 multiple times that day, it might create the sense that these seemingly random occurrences are connected.[31] For Tamar, her father commanding her to go to her sick brother's house and make him food so that he might feel better is likely not out of the realm of a standard occurrence. Yet the fact that he is constantly watching her and that he dismisses the servants from his house, leaving her alone, is strange. The audience is not told when Tamar initially suspects her brother's intentions, but the strangeness of her brother's actions and his unusual refusal of the food and command to eat from

[30] Freud, *The Uncanny*, 144.
[31] Freud, *The Uncanny*, 145.

her hand in the bedchamber acts as a major clue that there is horror lurking underneath the surface of the scene.

The text builds the sense of the uncanny through the repetition of the phrase "while Amnon watched." The phrase "in [Amnon's] sight" appears three times in the first two scenes of the passage. In v. 5, Jonadab tells Amnon to ask his father to have Tamar make cakes for him "לעיני."[32] In the following verse, Amnon enacts Jonadab's plan and asks David to have Tamar make a couple of cakes "בעיני." The plan comes to fruition in v. 8 when Tamar makes the cakes "בעיניו." In a text that uses repetition and detailed descriptions of the character's actions, the placement of Tamar in the sight of Amnon is noteworthy. The text does not want the audience to forget the danger at hand. The monster is lying there, watching, waiting for his opportunity. The audience sees what Amnon sees as he waits for his prey. The audience is helpless to watch the events unfold from the very perspective of the causative force of evil in the scene.

The use of the "I-perspective" of the monster is a common device of the horror story. As discussed in the Introduction, Michael Powell's 1960 film *Peeping Tom* uses the camera to show the perspective of the killer. The film follows a cinematographer, Mark. Mark works as a cinematographer but moonlights as a photographer of pornographic magazines. In his spare time, Mark shoots home videos of him killing women using an unseen weapon. The film opens up with the shot of a closed eyeball opening up. The camera then cuts to a street in SOHO where a prostitute waits on the sidewalk. A man in a trench coat approaches the woman. The camera cuts to a hidden camera stashed in the coat of the man. The man turns the camera on, and the perspective shifts and the audience now views the scene through the lens of the camera. The

[32] *HALOT*, "עין."

camera seems to be at eye level of the man in the trench coat. The point is clear. We are viewing the scene through the eyes of the man. We (that is to say the audience that now identifies with the killer) follow the woman through a door, up a staircase, and into a room. We watch the woman begin to undress, when the man releases a switch and approaches the woman. The woman begins to scream as she is looking at something that is hidden to the audience. In the climatic final scene of the movie, it is revealed what appears when Mark releases the switch. Carol Clover describes the murder weapon. "The tripod is equipped with a hidden, extendable spike and the movie camera with a mirror, neither of which appears in the visual frame of the murder scenes; when Mark moves in for a close-up, the spike pierces the victim's throat and she sees her own terrified face in the mirror."[33] In the first two murders of the movie, the murder weapon is off screen. The entire perspective is on the face of the victim. Mark's eyes (thus our eyes) and the camera lens are one and the same.

John Carpenter recreates this scene in his film, *Halloween* (1978).[34] The setting has changed to a suburban home in Illinois, and the murderer is now a little child. The perspective is still shown from the eyes of the monster. The camera searches around the house trying to stay hidden from Michael's sister and her boyfriend. Once the boyfriend leaves, the camera ascends the staircase and creeps towards the sister. In case the audience has forgotten that we are looking through the eyes of a monster, a hand grabs a mask and puts it over the screen. We then watch as the hand of a child murders the teenage sister. Clover comments, "In these passages, we see through his eyes and hear his breathing and heartbeat. His and our vision is partly obscured by the bushes or window blinds in the foreground. By such means we are forced, the logic goes, to

[33] Clover, *Men, Women, and Chains*aws, 169-70.

[34] "Opening Scene," *Halloween*, directed by John Carpenter (1978,Compass International Pictures, 2020), Streaming.

identify with the killer."[35] If the perspective is equal to the audience's identity, then the audience is on the hook for the violence that is done for the horror story. The connection between Tamar's actions and Amnon's sight strives to place the scene through Amnon's perspective. As the audience watches the SOHO prostitute or Michael Myers's sister be murdered, we are forced to watch as Amnon rapes Tamar.

Wickham Clayton discusses the use of the I-perspective in his book on the *Friday the 13th* franchise,[36] a franchise that utilized the I-perspective in film after film. For Clayton, the I-perspective does two things: (1) It obscures the face of the killer, thus leaving the killer's identity until later in the film, and (2) It emphasizes the closeness that the killer has to their victim. "The eye/camera creates a sense of proximity, or distance, between the character looking and the subject of the camera's gaze. Whether we see the stalker's eye/camera with the victim as the subject or the victim's eye/camera with the stalker or killer as the subject, the audience gets a clear sense of the distance from one to the other."[37] This perspective creates what Clayton calls a "proximity fear."[38] Directors will use this proximity fear to build tension throughout a scene as the killer gets closer and closer to the intended victim. In 2 Samuel 13, we see the use of proximity fear as Amnon watches Tamar prepare the cakes in his sight. He then asks Tamar to come to him so that she can feed him the cakes from her hands. The idea of Amnon eating out of Tamar's hands may cause the reader to become squeamish but also to shriek at how close the monster is to his intended victim.

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[35] Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws,* 45.

[36] Wickham Clayton, *See! Hear! Cut! Kill! Experiencing Friday the 13th* (University Press of Mississippi, 2020), 21.

[37] Clayton, *See! Hear! Cut! Kill!*, 21.

[38] Clayton, *See! Hear! Cut! Kill!*, 22.

The 2024 film, *In a Violent Nature,* portrays a cliché slasher film that shows a serial killer stalker releasing extreme violence on college-aged campers in the woods.[39] However, *In a Violent Nature* is shot almost entirely from the perspective of the serial killer, Johnny. While the movie never uses a "first person" shot, the story unfolds from Johnny's perspective. Director Chris Nash and cinematographer Pierce Derks had one rule while shooting: that Johnny must be in every shot of the film until the final act. The movie has been panned by some critics as entirely too slow because much of the movie is watching a man slowly walking through the woods. But what we get is a horror film told almost exclusively (until the final act) from the monster's perspective. The audience only knows what Johnny knows and we only learn what the campers know if by chance Johnny happens to overhear their conversations. The audience sees the world through Johnny's lens. Yet the audience is still able to connect with some of the characters. We quickly learn who are the "important campers" and who is just narrative "cannon fodder."[40] We are still able to care for Kris, the eventual Final Girl, and root for her once the third act comes. Just because we view horror stories through the monster's lens, it does not equate to the audience's intentions.

Chapter 13:1-11 is revealed from Amnon's point of view. The audience is told Amnon's inner feelings, and his issues are central to the text. We follow him as he talks with Jonadab, his father, and then we see Tamar make the cakes in his eyes. The audience knows what Amnon knows and we see this world through his eyes. Meir Sternberg emphasizes the importance of perspective in narrative. "[Point of view] entails a relation between subject and object,

[39] *In a Violent Nature*, directed by Chris Nash (XYZ Films, 2024), film.

[40] In the context of horror, characters whose only purpose in the story is to be killed by the killer are referred to as "cannon fodder."

perceiving mind and perceived reality."[41] Sternberg suggests that the reader ask of the text, "Who stands behind this piece of language and what does it project? From what viewpoint does that action or description unfold, and why? Can the perceiver be identified and evaluated by the field of perception?"[42] Sternberg suggests that there is a relationship between the audience and whose reality we are perceiving. Clover suggests that viewing the horror from an I-perspective connects the audience to the crime that is taking place. For Clover, the audience is a part of the crime because they are the ones who presumably paid to go see these kinds of movies. We are the ones who find these kinds of horror movies entertaining. Clover refers to the psychoanalyst in *Peeping Tom,* "Scoptophilia! ... the morbid urge to gaze!"[43] While it may be impossible to prove the Deuteronomistic History as entertainment, we can still glean some knowledge by questioning why the author would want the audience to view Tamar's rape from Amnon's perspective. Perhaps, this may be answered when Tamar exclaims, "such a thing is not done in Israel." This is the House of David, the royal name for which ancient Judah sticks to its claim. If the house of David is a House of Horrors, then perhaps the ancient audience must struggle with their own hidden horrors.

Grafius argues that the entire Books of Samuel are haunted by the very figure for which the scrolls are given their name, the prophet Samuel. Despite dying in 1 Samuel 25, his ghost figuratively (and literally in 1 Samuel 28) haunts both 1 and 2 Samuel.[44] Samuel's warnings against the terrors of kings in 1 Samuel 8 haunt the remaining of the story. Samuel's words ring

[41] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Indiana University Press, 1985). 129.
[42] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 129-30.
[43] Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws,* 171.
[44] Grafius, *Reading the Bible with Horror,* 60.

in the audience's thoughts as they read the crimes and horrors enacted by both King Saul and King David.

Grafius builds his argument off Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*. In this work published in 1993 in the wake of the fall of the Iron Curtain, Derrida argues that Western Society is still haunted by the failed futures of Karl Marx. By this, Derrida means that the modern West is haunted by the promises of Marxism and the loss of those futures that never come. In his commentary on 1 Samuel, David Jobling compares 1 Samuel to the modern west. "It is this hoped-for future, which is also perhaps a lost past."[45] At the beginning of the book of Samuel, Israel is supposed to be a society living fully under the power of YHWH, fully entrusting in YHWH. Yet, the people demand a king and spend the rest of the two books of Samuel haunted by the egalitarian society that could have been if they had simply heeded Samuel's warnings. Grafius states,

> Derrida saw a world that was mourning the promise of justice, a reality which did not exist in the past, but which could nevertheless be felt as an absence in the present. We see this process of mourning recurring throughout ghost stories, mourning in which the past can never be reconciled because it continually imposes itself upon the present…The Biblical writes remember a past that never was and try to bring the present closer to this vision of a reality in which Israel is devoted to YHWH totally and completely. But through all of their efforts, they can only cause a small ripple in the present, a slamming down of the piano lid or a scattering of books.[46]

The promise of the land flowing with milk and honey haunts the people of ancient Israel as they fall victim to the terrors of kings, all while the ghostly specter of Samuel reminds them that they

[45] David Jobling, *1 Samuel*, Berot Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry (Liturgical Press, 1998), 292.

[46] Grafius, *Reading the Bible with Horror*, 68.

could have had paradise. Of course, this paradise never happened but the specter of the lost future still lingers in the whispering winds of specters.

Despite Samuel's warnings of the terror of kings, 2 Samuel 7 still announces King David as the progenitor to the House of David and YHWH promises him that his throne will be a throne forever.[47] Throughout the book of kings, David acts as a ghost in which all other kings are compared. They never live up to their ancestor for whom the house is named. We see in 2 Samuel that David's reign is full of his own horrors. The author of Samuel recognizes the irony here. That even the great house of David is full of men lying, stealing, and raping to fulfill their own desires. The Succession Narrative does not describe a holy arrival for King Solomon. Rather, Solomon's road to power is a road full of blood and conniving politics. The Succession Narrative is a polemic against kings, all while telling the story of the most beloved king of Israel. This is not entertainment for entertainment's sake but ancient Israel's own exploration of their system and past. The author seems to long for the days of the Judges when they relied on YHWH, despite that past never existing. Ancient Israel, under kings, is haunted by a time when they were fully committed to YHWH and not to the kings and their selfish whims. The House of David is a haunted house full of terrors.

Much can be said about the male gaze in horror stories.[48] In these films, the connection between murder and sex is a fine line. In *Psycho*, Norman Bates watches Marion undress from a peephole in the wall. In the opening scene of *Peeping Tom*, we watch the prostitute undress. In *Halloween*, Michael's sister is topless, brushing her hair, presumably post coitus. All of these "I-perspective" scenes occur right before the peeper murders the female. Mary Anna Bader notes

[47] 2 Samuel 7:16.
[48] See Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws.*

that the process of making cakes may have fit into the male gaze. "Was Jonadab referring to Amnon's seeing Tamar up close or to his watching her knead and bake food? These activities may have been sexually evocative."[49] In the same way, the camera slows down as lifeguards run down the beach in an episode of Baywatch, perhaps, Tamar's baking of the cakes represents something sexual in the eyes of Amnon.

In conclusion, 2 Samuel 13:1-11 introduces the readers to the plot and characters that will develop throughout the chapter, ultimately leading to Absalom's rebellion. While it is important to note Nathan's curse from chapter 12 and the succession narrative themes that are flowing underneath this chapter, the reader must not forget the personal nature of Amnon's crime. The text uses horror to bring the reader into the tension of the opening section. The reader is acutely aware of Amnon's illicit desire for his sister, Tamar. The reader sees this world through the eyes of Amnon. The reader is aware of his thoughts and listens as Jonadab schemes to get Amnon what he wants. The reader must sit silently, unable to warn Tamar, as her father orders her to go to Amnon's house and take care of him. The reader watches, through Amnon's lustful gaze, as Tamar comes into his house, prepares the dough, kneads the dough, forms the dough into cakes, bakes the cakes, and brings the cakes to Amnon. When Amnon seizes her and the tension finally breaks, the audience screams. In one swift move, Amnon has made his intentions clear and Tamar realizes her danger. But it is too late to run, and it is too late to hide.

The first 11 verses of 2 Sam 13 set the stage for the conflict of the passage, introduce the characters, alert the audience to the presence of the monster, and build the terror as Tamar prepares cakes for her brother as the monster lurks. This passage is set in the context of the

[49] Bader, *Sexual Violation*, 139.

succession narrative. In the previous chapter, Nathan confronted David about murdering Uriah and stealing Bathsheba for himself. Nathan prophecies that the "sword shall never depart from [David's] house."[50] Chapter 13 is the beginning fulfillment of this prophesy. David's house quickly becomes a house of horror with the rape of his daughter by his own son, followed by the murder of that son by David's other son. The succession to the throne of David will be a bloody road.

The author introduces the reader to Amnon and lets us in own his and Jonadab's scheme. We are aware of the dangers that Tamar is in when she comes to bake him cakes. Just as the audience is aware of a monster's presence before the protagonist, we know Tamar is in danger well before she does. Yet we are powerless to warn her, and our screams fall on deaf ears. This builds the tension of the scene as Tamar methodically brings out the dough, kneads it, puts in it a pan, and bakes it. All the while, Amnon is watching her. The scene is seen through Amnon's eyes reminiscent of a slasher film. We see the victim through the eyes of the monster. The tension of the scene rises and rises until it finally topples over and Amnon seizes his sister. The monster has left the shadows and come into the light.

[50] 2 Sam 12:10.

Chapter 4: 2 Samuel 13:12-22

A Critical Analysis of 2 Samuel 13:12-22

12. She said to him, “No, my brother, do not rape me for such a thing is not done in Israel. Do not do this monstrous thing.

13. Where will I send my reproach? And as for you, you will be like one of the monsters of Israel. Now, please speak with the King because he will not withhold me from you.”

14. But Amnon was not willing to listen to her voice. He was stronger than her, he attacked her, and he raped her.

15. Amnon then hated her with great hatred; the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love which he had loved her. So, Amnon said to her, “Get up and leave.”

16. But she said “No, for this great evil in sending me away is worse than what you have already done to me.” But he was not willing to listen to her.

17. Then he called his young attendants who served him, and he said “Please send this thing outside from my presence and bolt the door after her.

18. She had on her a long sleeve tunic that the virgin daughters of the king wore. Amnon’s attendant brought her out and bolted the door after her.

19. Tamar put ashes on her head, and she tore the long-sleeved tunic which she wore. She put her hand on her head, and she went away and cried out.

20. Absalom, her brother, said to her, “Has Amnon, your brother, been with you? Now, my sister, be silent. He is your brother. Do not do place your heart to this thing.” So, Tamar dwelled desolate in the house of Absalom, her brother.

21. When King David heard all these things, he was very angry.

22. Absalom spoke with Amnon neither good nor bad for Absalom hated Amnon because he had raped Tamar, his sister.

The scene has been set. The background has been explained. Our leading lady has been introduced, and she is now in the jaws of the monster. Amnon has seized her by her arm and made known his intentions. The monster is no longer hiding in the shadows but has manifested into the light. The second section is made up of three parts: Tamar pleading with Amnon, Amnon's abuse of Tamar, including rape and the subsequent abandonment, and Tamar wailing outside of Amnon's home. Trible separates these sections differently than I do. She defines these sections as 13:9 through 18. Trible defines the boundaries of the *inclusio* as Amnon commanding his servants to leave in verse 9 and him commanding the servants to take Tamar away in v.18. Her *inclusio* follows:

A. Amnon's command to the servants and their response. (13:9de).
B. Amnon's command to Tamar and her response (13:10- 11a).
C. Conversation between Amnon and Tamar (13:11b-14a)
D. Rape (13:14b- 15b)
C'-B'. Conversation between Amnon and Tamar:
Amnon's command to Tamar and her response (13:15c-16)
A'. Amnon's command to a servant and his response (13:17-18)[1]

Trible is correct to note this particular partition. From the moment that Amnon sends the guards away to the moment that Amnon sends Tamar away, Tamar is trapped in Amnon's web. She is isolated and helpless. Though it does question how the guards could hear Amnon if he sent them away. Presumably, they were within earshot of the rape since they could hear Amnon when he ordered them to take Tamar away in v. 17. If this is the case, did Amnon expect to get away with his crime? Are the servants only loyal to Amnon but not to Absalom — or even to David,

[1] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 44.

Tamar's father? Evidently, Amnon is not worried about the rumors and mumblings of his servants.

Once Amnon has Tamar alone and, in his room, he seizes her and asks, "Come lie with me, my sister." Tamar responds, "No, my brother." The familial language here seems out of place considering that Amnon previously has downplayed his familial relationship with Tamar. Now, he is openly admitting to the incestuous nature of his scheme. Frymer-Kensky notes that brother and sister language is used elsewhere in romantic poems. "Readers of Song of Songs will remember 'my sister' as a nickname for the beloved, 'my sister the bride.' The love poetry of Sumer often has Dumuzi refer to his beloved Inanna as 'my sister' and she to him as 'my brother.' These words are frequently the terminology of love, and we almost hear the love poetry in Amnon's caressing 'my sister.'"[2] The use of "my sister" as a double entendre in this context is sickening. For, Amnon has no true intentions of ever marrying Tamar, but she is his half-sister. The image of a creepy man calling a young girl "darling" comes to mind, all while basked in the stench of incest.

Tamar responds, "No, my brother, do not violate me." Her use of sibling language should be read as a way of softening Amnon's intentions or as a way of reminding him of the incestuous nature of what he is planning. Tamar continues and says "אל-תענני," "*do not violate me*." The translation of ענה has been the subject of much discussion.[3] While it is the closest term that we have in Hebrew to English "rape," it is not a one-to-one translation. Rather, it is better translated as humble or oppress. "English translations often render this term *inna* as 'raped,' but there is no single word in Hebrew that can be accurately translated as 'rape.' This term *inna* can be

[2] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible: A New Interpretation of Their Stories* (Schocken Books, 2002), 160.

[3] *HALOT*, "ענה."

translated as 'violate, subdue, oppress, or degrade' and so to 'violate' or rape a woman also carries the connotation of oppressing and degrading her."[4]

For Frymer-Kensky, ענה is best translated as "degrade" in most contexts in the Hebrew Bible and is often used not in a sexual connotation. Frymer-Kensky notes that Deut 23:25-26, the one Biblical law explicitly about rape, does not use *inna*.[5] Rather, it reads, והחזיק-בה האיש ושכב עמה "and he forces her and lies with her." Frymer-Kensky concludes that the meaning of *inna* shifts based on word order. In 2 Sam 13:15, the Hebrew reads, ויחזק ממנה וענה ושכב אתה "and he seized her and he forced her, and he lay with her." In Gen 34:2 where Shechem violates Dinah, the daughter of Judah, the Hebrew reads, ויקח אתה וישכב אתה ויענה "and he took her and he laid with her and he degraded her." The meaning of the word is thus connected to the syntax in the sentence. Where *inna* means rape in some cases, it may mean degrade in others. There is a reason for this difference in word order.

In rape, abuse starts the moment the rapist begins to use force, long before penetration. In other illicit sexual encounters, the act of intercourse may not be abusive.[6] For Frymer-Kensky, Tamar is raped while Dinah is only raped from the perspective of her family. Rather, Dinah may have consented by modern standards, but her family did not. "It seems strange that the Dinah story only hints that the act was consensual instead of making it clear. After all, from Dinah's point of view, there is a very big difference if she was willing or forced… The story is told from the viewpoint of the family and society from which Dinah went out. From their perspective, an unmarried girl's consent does not make sex a permissible act. She has, after all, no right of consent."[7]

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[4] Schulte, *The Absence of God in Biblical Rape Narratives*, 60.
[5] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 183.
[6] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 183.
[7] Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible*, 183.

Frymer-Kensky's argument is shaky. She argued earlier that the one biblical law that explicitly refers to rape (Deut 22:25-36) does not include the root ענה and yet, she assigns rape to Tamar but not to Dinah based on syntax. While it is clear ענה refers to an act of violation, it may sometimes be associated with sexual violation and other times not. It differs on the individual context and other words used. Schulte notes that the different uses of ענה may differ according to author or time in which it was written.[8] What Schulte, Frymer-Kensky, and Bader all agree on is that ענה must be translated in light of the surrounding context. In 2 Sam 13:12, Tamar finds herself in the bedroom of her half-brother who has grabbed her and told her to come and lie with him. She is a virgin. She is alone. Her captor has been ogling her since she walked in the door. While we do not have a one-to-one word for rape, we can understand that in this context when Tamar says "אל-אחי אל-תענני," she is saying "do not rape me." The sexual violation is demonstrative by the context of the character's actions.

Robert S. Kawashima takes up the question if a woman can even be raped in ancient Israel if she did not hold the power of consenting in the first place. "Biblical law, inasmuch as one might posit a coherent view on this matter, does recognize the possibility of a forcible sexual encounter, but it defines it as a particular case of the more general crime of illicit sex, and identifies the 'victim' of this crime as the father or husband whose claims over the 'object' of the crime — daughter or wife — have been 'violated' (*innah*)."[9] Kawashima examines the place of women in the biblical law codes and concludes that since women are not legally able of consent then they cannot legally be raped. Kawashima further explains his translation of *inna* in a footnote. "If I am correct, this verb should never be translated as 'rape,' as it often is. Inasmuch

[8] Schulte, *The Absence of God in Biblical Rape Narratives*, 18.

[9] Robert S. Kawashima, "Could a Woman Say 'No' in Biblical Israel? On the Genealogy of Legal Status in Biblical Law and Literature," *AJS Review* 35, no. 1 (2011): 2.

as biblical legal thought recognized the basic personhood of all people, neither women nor girls could ever be reduced to pure objects. But neither did it recognize them as full subjects, and so they could never constitute victims of a legally prosecutable crime."[10] Kawashima suggests that while women in biblical law are not merely objects, they cannot be considered subjects and therefore cannot be the victims in a crime. This seems to suggest that a woman cannot consent and therefore she cannot be raped. This conclusion is fallacious because if someone cannot consent and consent is a requirement for a permissible sexual encounter, then women in ancient Israel could only be raped.

Sandie Gravett takes a different approach than Kawashima. In her article, "Reading Rape in the Hebrew Bible: A Consideration of Language," she takes up the issue that there is not a biblical Hebrew verb that is a one-to-one translation for rape. However, this does not deter Gravett from considering rape as an appropriate way to translate in certain contexts.

> The indeterminacy of language opens up the process of textual production to necessary variation and the nuances of interpretive feel. Conscientious expression of what the source language attempts to communicate remains important — the document does retain its own integrity — but those concerns stand in a balanced tension to the interests of the translators and readers…. Applying that standard to rendering Hebrew words as 'rape' means that even though the cultures which wrote and passed down the Hebrew Bible conceived of sexual assault differently from our own, 'rape' remains the primary term we use in English for such violence. 'Rape', then, communicates best on a bodily or visceral level to a twenty-first century reader, conveying the same feeling of forcible violation of a whole array of Hebrew euphemisms.[11]

Gravett argues that translators do not need a one-to-one translation for translators to express the correct meaning of the words. From the context of the passage and other words being used, it is clear that 2 Samuel 13 is an example of rape. Tamar tells her brother, "No." She tries to reason

[10] Kawashima, *Could a Woman Say "No" in Biblical Israel*, 2-3n2.

[11] Sandi Gravett, "Reading 'Rape' in the Hebrew Bible: A Consideration of Language." *JSOT* 28, no. 3 (2004): 296-97.

with him. Yet, he overpowers her and forces her to have sexual intercourse with him. Tamar is raped.

While I have issues with Kawashima's conclusion, he is right to point out the patriarchal nature of much of biblical literature. Kawashima is right that women were not treated as equals in the law and there is a patriarchal undertone in all the biblical rape narratives. There is a real sense in the text that the victim of Amnon's crime is David and Absalom, and many interpreters have taken this stance. Kawashima's conclusions force the reader to recognize what Graybill calls the fuzziness of rape in the Hebrew Bible.[12] Yes, from a legal standpoint, Amnon's crime is against David and perhaps Absalom. This does not change the fact that David and Absalom love Tamar and would not want her to be forcibly raped by someone. In ancient Israel, as is today, fathers love their daughters and brothers love their sisters, and to believe that they would not be horrified by the rape of their loved ones is folly.[13]

Leah Rediger Schulte and Tammi J. Schneider address the issue of rape in the Hebrew Bible in their article "The Absence of the Deity in Rape Scenes of the Hebrew Bible."[14] Schulte and Schneider's study begins when they noticed that YHWH does not appear neither in Judges 19 nor in 2 Sam 13. This led Schulte and Schneider to question why YHWH is absent in Biblical rape scenes and can this discovery lead to a definition of rape in the Hebrew Bible.

As mentioned above there is no strict word in the Hebrew Bible that translates directly to the English word "rape" nor does the Hebrew Bible offer a strict definition of what constitutes as

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[12] Graybill, *Texts after Terror*, 33.

[13] This point was made by Tammi Schneider over the course of various seminars at Claremont Graduate University. While this statement should be applied to ancient Isreal as a general rule. It is not clear in the text of 2 Samuel that David loves Tamar. V. 21 describes David's anger at hearing what happened to Tamar but David still fails to do anything about it.

[14] Leah Rediger Schulte and Tammi J. Schneider, "The Absence of the Deity in Rape Scenes of the Hebrew Bible," in *The Presence and Absence of God: Claremont Studies in the Philosophy of Religion, Conference 2008*, ed. Ingolf U. Dalferth (Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 21-33.

rape. Schulte and Schneider's study centers around a search for a biblical definition of rape by comparing the two texts that are unequivocally considered cases of rape in the Hebrew Bible: Judges 19 and 2 Samuel 13. "These are the only examples with no mitigating circumstances, and the terminology used and context in which they are situated could hold the key to revealing the paradigm of rape. The two central scenes also contain vivid, violent and painful imagery that highlights the victim's anguish."[15] The Levite throws his *pilegesh* to the mob, where she is gang raped until the following morning. She is then left for dead, and the Levite finds her grasping the threshold of the door the following morning (Judg. 19:27). Tamar is seized by Amnon and when she tells Amnon "No," he overpowers her and rapes her before casting her out of his household.

The Levite's *pilegesh* and Tamar do not hold much in common other than both being from Bethlehem.[16] Schulte and Schneider point out several commonalities between the two women when they examine which verbs for which the two women are objects. "Commonalities only appear where the women are the objects of verbs or prepositional phrases. Someone speaks to both women. Both are seized. Both are abused or oppressed (Hebrew verb *inna*). Both are sent out. Not all these actions are done by the rapist, but all are done to the women."[17] Schulte and Schneider further notice that in neither passage is there a direct punishment of the rapist. In both cases, both women have living fathers neither of whom act. Both texts refer to an aspect of the scenario as a "*nebelah*" which I have translated as "abject thing" leaning on Kristeva's understanding of the abject. In Judges 19, the people who receive a cut off portion of the *pilegesh*'s body refer to the gore as a *nebelah*. In 2 Sam 13, Tamar tells Amnon not to do this

[15] Schulte and Schneider, "The Absence of the Deity in Rape Scenes," 22.
[16] Schulte and Schneider, "The Absence of the Deity in Rape Scenes," 24.
[17] Schulte and Schneider, "The Absence of the Deity in Rape Scenes," 24.

nebelah. Further, both rapes lead to war. In Judges, the people of Israel rally against the people of Shiloh. In 2 Samuel, Absalom will eventually revolt against David leading to a civil war.

The comparison between Judges 19 and 2 Sam 13 leads Schulte and Schneider to conclude that rape scenes in the Hebrew Bible must contain four aspects: (1) The women are the object of the verbs for: speak, abuse or oppress, and send out. (2) The rapist is not immediately punished. (3) The failure to punish the rapists leads to war. (4). YHWH is absent from the pericope.[18]

Schulte and Schneider take this paradigm and apply it to the Dinah in Genesis 34 and to David and Bathsheba in 2 Sam 11. In Genesis 34, Dinah is clearly raped under Schulte and Schneider's paradigm. She is the object of the verbs for speak, abuse, and send out. Shechem is not immediately punished by Jacob, Dinah's father. Jacob's failure to punish Shechem leads to a war between the town of Shechem and the sons of Jacob. YHWH does not appear anywhere in Genesis 34.

The case of David and Bathsheba is not as clear. Bathsheba is the object of the vital verbs, David is not immediately punished and there is a war already occurring that intensifies after the affair. However, YHWH does appear as the final word in the final sentence in the pericope. "Evidence that the biblical text may consider this close to rape, but shies away from it, is that the name of the deity appears in the very last sentence of the pericope. Bathsheba has a husband who should protect her and/or be considered the victim in this case, but Uriah is place in a battle specifically so that he will be killed at war."[19] In Schulte and Schneider's view, the case of David and Bathsheba is close to rape, but the text holds back from fully labeling it rape.

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[18] Schulte and Schneider, "The Absence of the Deity in Rape Scenes of the Hebrew Bible," 25.

[19] Schulte and Schneider, "The Absence of the Deity in Rape Scenes of the Hebrew Bible," 27.

At the center of Schulte and Schneider's understanding of rape scenes in the Hebrew Bible is the question as to why the deity is absent in these texts. Schulte and Schneider go on to examine law codes from the Bible and the ancient Near East, examining how violent actions are punished and how the deity is present in these punishments. Schulte and Schneider note that in the case of rape, the women are not considered the victim but rather her father, husband, or fiancée. However, the deity is present in other violent law codes.

> In each of these five other violent crimes against another's physical body, namely murder, genocide, physical injury, adultery, and kidnapping, the deity is always present. While the form of the deity's presence ranges from mention of the deity's name to the deity speaking with a criminal, the deity is undeniably present. The deity's presence in these crimes and absence in biblical rape scenes clearly shows an intentional decision the part of the narrator. Even crimes that could be considered on the fence regarding rape follow a similar trajectory…. Biblical authors clearly communicate the anguish and horror of rape in the narratives we have examined above in which the deity's marked absence stands in stark contrast to the deity's presence in the other violent crimes discussed. In the law codes of the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East, it is clear the legislation focuses on the male victims of the rape, not the violated woman.[20]

The leads Schulte and Schneider to conclude that YHWH's absence from the biblical rape scenes is connected to YHWH's disapproval of how rape was punished in ancient Israel. For Schulte and Schneider, YHWH does not appear in rape scenes in the Hebrew Bible because the deity disapproves of how rape is punished in the Hebrew Bible. YHWH according to Schulte and Schneider recognizes that the true victim of rape is the woman and not the man that own's her.[21]

With all of this in mind, Tamar tells Amnon that such a thing is not done in Israel and that he will be considered a *nabal*.[22] She then continues and tells Amnon to go and speak to

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[20] Schulte and Schneider, "The Absence of the Deity in Rape Scenes of the Hebrew Bible," 33.

[21] Schulte and Schneider, "The Absence of the Deity in Rape Scenes of the Hebrew Bible," 33.

[22] The word *nabal* is connected to Nabal, Abigael's first husband in 1 Samuel 25. I will draw a connection between these passages below in chapter 5.

David. Presumably, David would grant Amnon's request to marry Tamar. The notion that King David would permit such an atrocious thing seems horrendous to the modern-day reader, but Kawashima suggests that this underlines his point about the legal status of women. "That which is 'not done in Israel,' it turns out, is failing to procure the consent of the father: 'Speak, please, to the king; for he will not withhold me from you.' True, one might interpret her remarkably articulate response as mere rhetoric, an attempt to forestall the impending assault, but the principle of verisimilitude still suggests that David, as patriarch of the house, is the legal entity who matters."[23] Tamar tells Amnon to go to David because he is the only one that can consent to this action. If he consents, then they can marry and have legit children. However, if she is raped then her status as a virgin daughter is taken away. Tamar begs, "Where could I send my reproach?"

After Tamar is raped, she claims that sending her away and not marrying her is worse than what he had already done to her. All of this underlines the patriarchal nature of the biblical laws that surround this passage. The fact that Tamar is so fearful of her life post-rape that she would beg Amnon to marry her stresses the complexity of this passage.

> Why would a victim seek protection from her rapist? The answer, for Tamar, lies in the biblical law she has already so eloquently used in her defense: a virgin once raped can anticipate retribution from the rapist, who is expected to pay her father, marry her, and never divorce her (Deut. 22:28-29). Marriage, even to her rapist, would offer Tamar the opportunity for a future in Israel as a correct mother with potentially correct offspring to inherit the covenant. However, a raped woman rejected by the man who stole her virginity has no opportunity to gain status in Israel; she remains 'desolate'.[24]

The reader, both ancient and modern, understands what is at stake for Tamar. Tamar would rather marry her rapist than face the bleak future that a raped unmarried woman faces. There is no hope for her unless Amnon chooses to marry her. Unfortunately, as Morrison notes, Amnon

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[23] Kawashima, *Could a Woman Say No in Ancient Israel*, 21.
[24] Schulte, *The Absence of God in Biblical Rape Narratives*, 59.

does not have any interest in marrying Tamar. His love for her was always physical lust; a monstrous desire to control her.

Verse 18 describes the robes that Tamar was wearing. She had on a long-sleeved tunic that only the virgin daughters of the king wore. The *ketonet happassim*[25] is often translated as a coat of many colors and is the same garment associated with Joseph in Gen 37:3.[26] Schulte draws a connection between the brothers in both contexts. "Joseph's brothers control his life, since they sell him into slavery and tell their father he is dead. Likewise, Tamar's brothers control her life; one brother rapes her and the other silences her, which means her potential life as a virgin princess and mother in Israel is lost."[27] In contrast to Genesis 37, 2 Sam 13:18 adds that this tunic is worn by the virgin daughters of the king בנות-המלך הבתולת מעילים. In v. 19, Tamar rips this robe, symbolizing the tearing of her virginity but certainly the mourning of her future. She covers herself in ashes and begins to mourn, for she is now desolate.

2 Samuel 13 :12-22 as Horror

Tamar continues her plea to Amnon by arguing that such a thing is not done in Israel. Schulte notes that it is not clear from the context what exactly is not done in Israel: rape or incest.[28] Morrison suggests that it is the rape of a virgin daughter that would cause such an outrage. "[Tamar] appeals to the custom that, as she explains, a virgin daughter of the king needed the king's permission to wed. Thus, raping her will render him a 'scoundrel,' in Hebrew,

[25] *HALOT*, "כתנת."
[26] Sweeney, *1–2 Samuel*, 255.
[27] Schulte, *The Absence of God in Biblical Rape Narratives*, 59.
[28] Schulte, *The Absence of God in Biblical Rape Narratives*, 56.

a *nabal*."[29] Morrison connects Tamar's logic with her suggestion in v. 14 that if Amnon asks King David's permission, then he will grant it to Amnon.

However, this phrase "for such a thing is not done in Israel" deserves more attention. A version of this phrase is found in all three of the major rape-and-revenge narratives in the Hebrew Bible. Genesis 34:7 reads, "Now the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard it; and the men were grieved, and they were very angry because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing ought not to be done'" (NSRV). כי-נבלה עשה בישראל לשכב את-בת-יעקב וכן לא יעשה. In this context, Jacob's sons are full of anger because a local prince has raped their sister, Dinah, and is now asking for her hand in marriage. Jacob's sons devise a scheme to exact revenge by convincing the people of Shechem that they cannot allow Dinah to marry the prince unless all of the men of the city are circumcised. The Hivites agree and when they are recovering from their circumcisions, the brothers ransack the entire city.

Similarly, Judges 19:30 reads, "And it came about that all who say it said, 'Nothing like this has ever happened or been seen from the day when the sons of Israel came up from the land of Egypt to this day. Consider it, take counsel and speak up'" (NSRV) לא-נהיתה ולא-נראתה כזאת למיום עלות בני-ישראל מצרים עד היום הזה. This phrase occurs after the Levite was attacked by a mob of Gibeanites. In the hopes of saving himself, the Levite offers his *pilegesh* to the mob and they gang rape her until the next morning. The Levite takes the beaten body of the woman and cuts her into pieces and sends a piece to the twelve tribes of Israel.) It is not immediately clear what the "such a thing" is referring to in v. 30. Is it that the woman was raped to death or that her body was cut into pieces? Phillips argues that the abject in this story is the breaking of customary

[29] Morrison, *2 Samuel*, 173.

hospitality laws.[30] In the context of 19:23 and 20:5-6, the most prominent issue is the lords of Gibeah's desire to kill the man and murder the *pilegesh*.

Using intertextuality as a lens, reading these three phrases together in conversation may help us understand the meaning of the passage. In other words, we should not seek out what Tamar might be referring to when she says "for such a thing is not done in Israel" in that specific context but what all three passages (including Genesis 34 and Judges 19) mean when they state that such a thing does not happen here. Julia Kristeva described intertextuality: "Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another."[31]

I do not presume to argue which of these three texts came first nor am I interested in dating each specific text. All three passages have been redacted and placed within the canon at some point in the first millennium BCE. Asking the question of which story is aware of the other is outside the purposes of this study. Rather, I insist that all three narratives were aware of each other during a redaction point and more importantly, these texts are talking to each other. Patricia K. Tull notes that the important part of intertextual readings is asking the "so what" question. "If the 'so what' questions can be satisfyingly addressed, study of intertextual allusion can be fruitful. But otherwise such studies can devolve into what Kristeva and her supporters disdainfully called 'banal source hunting,' demonstrating nothing more, over and over again, than that no text is an island indeed."[32] Rather, for Tull, the purpose of intertextual studies is to

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[30] Anthony Phillips, "Nebalah: A Term for Serious Disorderly and Unruly Conduct," *Vetus Testamentum* 25, no. 2 (1975): 237.

[31] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art,* ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora and Alice Jardine (Columbia University Press, 1980), 66.

[32] Patricia K. Tull, "Mikhail M. Bakhtin and Dialogical Approaches," in *Second Wave Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Marianne Grohmann and Hyun Chul Paul Kim (SBL Press, 2019), 185.

ask why the author would make such an allusion and what does engaging in another text tell us about the text at hand.

In other words, when Tamar says "for such a thing does not happen in Israel," the readers' minds are immediately drawn to Genesis 34 and Judges 19. In all three of these texts, the "it" that does not happen in Israel may be different but read together, the issue becomes clear. Ancient Israel is horrified by the sexual violence that has occurred in the three narratives. Yet there is an irony to the fact that these three stories are claiming that such things do not happen in Israel. It does happen in Israel; in fact, it has happened three times. This is where the horror story comes through. Robin Wood refers to it as the "Return of the Repressed."[33] The things that society ignores and forces into our shadows so that it is not to be mixed in with what "moral society" is. These crimes are treated as if they are done by outsiders, yet here the monstrous deed is being done by King David's prince.

Abjection is the sentiment behind the common phrase, "Throw him away and lock away the key." We are a society that has allowed abjection to permeate our reform system. Instead of believing in reform, we have allowed our identity to be based in purity. Anyone who is abject must be fully expelled and tossed away with feces and grime. This is the sentiment that worries Tamar in 2 Sam 13:13. If Amnon proceeds with his rape of his half-sister, then he will be considered as one of the נבלים of the land. They both will be considered abject and, thus, rejected by their society.[34]

The same way that societies use abjection to structure their laws and ordinances, religion also constructs its structures. Societies use laws to say that we do not do this because it is not

[33] Wood, *Robin Wood on the Horror Film*, 73.
[34] *HALOT*, "נבלה."

who we are. Religion also sets up rites and taboos to place boundary markers on who is a part of the religion. "Abjection appears as a rite of defilement and pollution in the paganism that accompanies societies with a dominant or surviving matrilineal character. It takes on the form of the exclusion of a substance (nutritive or linked to sexuality), the execution of which coincides with the sacred since it sets it up."[35] This appears in certain religions as dietary restrictions. Jews do not eat pork, or Hindus do not eat beef. This can become so ingrained in the society that being faced with the option becomes revolting to the practitioner. A Hindu practitioner's stomach might turn if one were to offer them beef by mistake. This dietary restriction becomes a defining part of the person. They are Hindu and therefore they abstain from eating beef. If they were to eat beef, then they would have acted in defiance of their identity and be considered abject from the religion. Thus, the act of eating beef becomes abject for the Hindu believer. The thought of doing this becomes offensive and crude.

Recently, many conservative, evangelical Christians turned to the internet to air their grievances over a movie recently added to the Netflix streaming service. In the movie, *The First Temptation of Christ,* Jesus is portrayed as being in a homosexual relationship. For many conservative evangelicals, homosexuality is abject and the notion that the most important figure in their religion conducted in an abject action, disgusted, enraged, and nauseated them. In one post, the poster exclaimed that one could not be a Christian if they were okay with this film portraying Jesus as a homosexual. In this example, even if someone was not a homosexual themselves, but simply okay with an artist's representation of Jesus as being a homosexual, was so abhorrent that it warranted expulsion from the group. The lines of the boundaries were drawn.

[35] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 17.

Kristeva, in *Powers of Horror*, gives an entire chapter to abjection in the Bible.[36] In the chapter titled "Semiotics of Biblical Abomination," Kristeva analyses the book of Leviticus to show how the Levitical law rejects the abject to establish an ancient Israelite identity. "Biblical impurity is permeated with the tradition of defilement in that sense; it points to but does not signify an autonomous force that can be threatening for divine agency….But the biblical test performs the tremendous forcing that consists in subordinating maternal power to symbolic order as attended to in the Temple. To the extent that the Temple is the Law, one is biblically pure or impure only with respect to social order."[37] In other words, biblical law defines if one is pure or abject within reference to the social order that the law defines. Leviticus 19:1-2 states, "YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I am YHWH your God am holy.'" YHWH orders that the people of Israel be holy, that is free of the abject, because YHWH is holy. Thus, to be unclean is to be abject and to be abject is to be counter to YHWH and thus outside the people of Israel. "The pure will be that which conforms to an established taxonomy, the impure, that which unsettles it, establishes intermixture and disorder."[38] This became manifest in Leviticus 16, in which the sins of the entire camp are placed on to a goat. The people then lead the goat outside the camp and leave it in the wilderness. The sins of the entire people of Israel are symbolically banished to the liminal space of the wilderness. The abject sins are not allowed to remain in the borders of the camp because they are outside of their category and not allowed to coexist with the holy.

Tamar's initial reaction to Amnon's proposition to lie with him is given in v. 12. "She answered him, 'No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do

[36] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 90-112.
[37] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror,* 90-91.
[38] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 98.

anything so abject (נבלה).” Just as in Genesis 34:7 and Judges 19:23, 2 Samuel 13 uses נבלה which I have argued above should be translated as “abject.” In his 1975 article, Anthony Philips argues that *nebalah* is connected to the breaking of customary law.[39] The term points towards an action “which is to be utterly deplored.” It is rejected by society; thus, it is abject. Hilary Lipka argues that *nebalah* breaks the communal boundaries of what is acceptable and what is taboo. “The term ‘outrage’ (נבלה) denotes behavior that involves a transgression of fundamental communal or religious principles that is such a great breach of the communal or cosmic order that it imperils the community’s very integrity, either by threatening bounds within the community, or threatening the bond between Yahweh and the community.”[40] Lipka goes on to argue that these actions “tear at the very fabric of the community” and those who commit them are put to death.[41] Lipka’s statement describes the essence of abjection. נבלה tears at the very fabric of the community and must be expelled from the society. In the realm of rape/revenge narratives, the נבלה always leads to the death of the actor. Dinah’s brothers kill Sechem. The people of Israel wage war against Gibeah. In 2 Samuel 13, Absalom will have Amnon killed. The abject must be purified.

Tamar continues in v. 13, “As for me, where could I carry my shame (חרפתי)? And as for you, you would be as one of the monsters (הנבלים) in Israel. Now, please speak to the king because he will not hold me from you.” Above I argued that חרפה (shame) and נבלה (abject) should be read in relation to the abject and the reaction to the abject. This plays out in this verse. The first clause of the verse begins with “as for me.” The shame connects to the one who is

[39] Phillps, “Nebalah,” 238-39.

[40] Hilary Lipka, *Sexual Transgression in the Hebrew Bible*, Hebrew Bible Monographs, 7. (Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), 209.

[41] Lipka, *Sexual Transgression in the Hebrew Bible*, 210.

affected by the abject thing. Like Dinah, Tamar will be defiled and will have to carry the חרפה the rest of her days. She will be made abject, not through actions of her own but through the actions of another. In the second half of the verse, Tamar accuses Amnon of being a נבלים (from the same root as נבלה). He is the one who is enacting the abject. He will become abject, but through his own means and he will be killed by Absalom because of it.

I have translated נבלים as monsters because it best conveys the meaning of someone who enacts the abject.[42] A monster is rejected by society because it lies between two realms. It is not something that can be acceptable or apart of society. They are not within our boundaries or laws, nor are they within the confines of others. They are the dwellers of liminal space. In the face of Tamar's reason, Amnon ignores the logic, reason, and laws recounted to him. He acts beyond the customs and rules. It is outside the realm of structure and order; thus, he is in the realm of the abject. Amnon is a monster.

After Amnon rapes Tamar he is overcome with the abject. Verse 15 states, "Then Amnon was seized with a very great hatred for her; his hatred was even greater than the love she felt for her. Amnon said to her, 'Get out!" The verse suggests that his hatred for her is greater than the love he felt for her at the beginning of 2 Samuel 13. At the beginning of the chapter, Amnon is so lovesick for Tamar that he becomes physically ill (13:2). Now, his hatred for her elicits another reaction for her. In his eyes, she has become a representation of the evil thing that he has done. She has become abject to him. He cannot allow her to remain in his presence. Therefore, he does what people always do with the abject. He expels her from his presence the same way one vomits when they drink bad milk. The abject cannot remain in our presence.

[42] *HALOT*, "נבלה."

This action is, of course, outrageous to the reader and to Tamar. Amnon is the monster who committed the crime. "The prince who gives this order through a double imperative is also the perpetrator of the crime. Such insensitivity is outrageous to the reader, evoking an even greater awareness of the wrong committed. This sense of appalling injustice anticipates the male responses that follow the rape. Such a hostile crime must be addressed by the males associated with Tamar."[43] Yamada's statement reveals his own abjection towards Amnon in the story. Even Yamada states that someone needs to do something. Tamar renounces Amnon's order for her to leave. "No, my brother, for this abjection (הנבלה) is worse than the other thing that you did to me." Tamar refers to his command to send her away as abject, even worse than the rape itself. Lipka explains the severity of Tamar's situation. "The only way for Tamar to preserve any sort of a future for herself other than one of shame and desolation is if the man who took her virginity out of wedlock does right by her and marries her. Tamar sees that Amnon does not want to do right by her by marrying her, and she knows that if he does not, then her future is bleak."[44] Lipka is referring to Exod. 22:16, which states "when a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged to be married, and lies with her, he shall give the bride-price for her maker her his wife." Amnon sending Tamar outside indicates that he does not intend to marry Tamar. He has willingly gone against the customs and laws of the community once again, underlining his state in the realm of the abject.

Tamar's willingness to marry her rapist in both v. 13 "for he will not withhold me from you," and in v. 16 "do not send me away," does not fit in with how the audience wants a rape victim to act. We want her to run away to safety or enact violent revenge. This is what the rape-

[43] Yamada, *Configurations of Rape in the Hebrew Bible*, 119.
[44] Lipka, *Sexual Transgressions in the Hebrew Bible*, 215.

and-revenge movies of the 70s and 80s will offer to their blood-seeking audiences. Instead, Tamar's reaction to be raped is by begging Amnon to marry her. Graybill labels Tamar's situation as "messy."[45] The situation is complicated and Tamar does not have a straight path forward. She either marries her rapist and has some semblance of a normal life, or she is forgotten by her society. Tamar does not want to marry Amnon because she is in love with him or is an anyway giving consent to Amnon's rape. Rather, Tamar consents to marriage to avoid the societal violence inflicted upon raped victims. Graybill compares Tamar's situation to the messy edges of consent. Sometimes a victim will say yes to a sexual encounter because saying no may put them in a dangerous or awkward situation. Graybill states,

> If the first episode of the Tamar story is "the violence that converts no into yes," then what follows – when Tamar expresses her desire to marry Amnon, even as she mourns the rape – offers an instance of "saying yes to something as the consequences of saying no would be too much." Thus, the Tamar story is one case study in why "women willingly agree to situations in which their safety and well-being are compromised."[46]

While it is easy for feminist readers to focus on the rape or mourn with Tamar when she screams, many interpreters ignore Tamar's consent to marriage in v. 16. But for Graybill, the messiness of Tamar's willingness to marry Amnon is "essential" to her story.[47]

Horror stories shine light onto the fears of a society which gives it a unique ability to criticize society and social issues. Jordan Peele's 2017 film *Get Out* uses a retelling of the Stepford wives but not focused on race as a way to critique how white liberals use and dehumanize African Americans.[48] Or, how George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* criticizes

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[45] Graybill, *Texts After Terror*, 142.
[46] Graybill, *Texts After Terror*, 44.
[47] Graybill, *Texts After Terror*, 44.
[48] *Get Out*, directed by Jordan Peele (Universal Pictures, 2017), film.

consumerism.[49] In 2 Sam 13:16, we see Tamar fear for her future post-rape. She considers Amnon's abandonment to be worse than the rape itself. Surely, the ancient readers would empathize with Tamar and recognize the cruel treatment of rape victims in ancient Israelite society. If it can happen to a princess, then it certainly can happen to the sisters and daughters of the ancient Israelite audience. Cheryl Anderson begs the question if ancient Israel would fit the description that modern feminists would call a "rape culture."

> On the whole, then, a culture's treatment of rape can provide a lens through which its notions of the masculine and the feminine can be evaluated. If masculinity is equated with male dominance and the subordination of females, as appears to be the case in the BC and DL, a rape culture is likely to exist. In such a culture, its law codes legitimate and organize rape as a practice. In the case of ancient Israel, though, these laws are neither the result of a democratic process nor do they necessarily represent generally held societal values. Clearly, though, these laws express the ideology of male dominance/female subordination….[50]

2 Samuel 13 is a text critical of how ancient Israelite society treats a raped woman and a rape culture. This is not to say that 2 Samuel 13 fits nicely into modern-day feminist agendas, but the horror lens makes clear that the text fears Tamar's future and mourns with her.

Amnon's servant expels Tamar from Amnon's presence and Tamar goes out tearing her clothes, putting on ash, and crying aloud. She is confronted by her brother, Absalom, who orders her to be quiet and has her live with him for the rest of her life. Verse 20 describes Tamar as desolate (שממה).[51] This same term is used to describe Daughter Zion's children in Lamentations 1:15. This description is used to draw shock from YHWH in Lam 1:20. In Ez 6:6, שמם is used to

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[49] *Dawn of the Dead*, directed by George A. Romero (1978,United Film Distribution Company, 2004, DVD), film.

[50] Cheryl B. Anderson, *Women, Ideology, and Violence: Critical Theory and the Construction of Gender in the Book of the Covenant and the Deuteronomic Law* (T & T Clark, 2004), 91.

[51] *HALOT*, "שממה."

refer to the wastes of the altars and high places after the day of the LORD. This is a term of abjection. "So, Tamar remained, a desolate woman in her brother's house. Just as she predicted, Tamar is not able to bear her shame. She lives out the rest of her life in social, psychological, and moral isolation. Tamar's state of desolation entails remaining unmarried and childless, a recluse aunt in her brother's household."[52] Tamar is in essence expelled from her society. She is allowed to live in her brother's house but is never able to take part in the rest of the community. Even though she is the victim, she is abject.

The detailed description of Tamar's clothing, mourning, and scream not only evokes pity from the reader but the audience experiences the horror that Tamar feels. "The narrator describes the severity of her grief by adding, 'She went away, crying continuously as she went.' The elaborate description of Tamar's mourning highlights the intensity and duration of her distress and evokes compassion from the reader."[53] As discussed above, the use of the "I-perspective" in horror stories can connect the audience with the identity of the killer and thus implicate the audience in the violence. However, the use of the "I-perspective" has another use. It allows the perspective to focus on the face of the (often-female) victim.

In the infamous shower scene in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*,[54] the camera only shows one brief shot of a knife attacking a female body; yet it is considered a major turning point in media violence.[55] Most of the cuts focus on Marion's screaming face. Similarly, in the opening scene of *Peeping Tom*, the audience watches the woman scream as the camera closes in on them. We see

[52] Lipka, *Sexual Transgressions in the Hebrew Bible*, 218.
[53] Yamada, *Configurations of Rape,* 122.
[54] "Shower Scene," *Psycho*.
[55] David J. Skal, *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*, rev. ed. (Faber and Faber, 2001), 311.

the actor's eyes begin to fill with tears and horror. In the final scene of the film, Mark explains his camera/weapon, which has a mirror on it, to Helen. "Do you know what the most frightening thing in the world is? It's fear. So, I did something very simple. Very simple. When they felt this spike touching their throats, and knew I was going to kill them, I made them watch their own deaths. I made them see their own terror as the spike went in. And if death has a face, they saw that too."[56] This is what the camera captures when it focuses on the victim's screaming face as the monster approaches; true fear. Amy Kalmanofsky writes, "By adopting the perspective of the main characters, readers experience the events of the narrative not as observers, but as participants…. Horror demands that its audience identify with its characters, experience their horror."[57] We scream because she screams.

It seems that if the horror narrative hopes to gain the most compassion and fear from the audience, the victim must be female. Italian *Giallo* director Dario Argento once said, "I like women, especially beautiful ones. If they have a good face and figure, I would much prefer to watch them being murdered than an ugly girl or a man."[58] Legendary suspense director Alfred Hitchcock has been quoted saying: "I always believe in following the advice of the playwright Sardou. He said, 'Torture the women!' … The trouble today is that we don't torture women enough."[59] Brian De Palma once told an interviewer, "Women in peril work better in the suspense genre. It all goes back to the *Perils of Pauline.*… If you have a haunted house and you have a woman walking around with a candelabrum, you fear for her more than you would for a

[56] "Final Scene," *Peeping Tom*.
[57] Kalmanofsky, *Terror All Around*, 102-3.
[58] Dario Argento, "Argento," interview by Alan Jones, Jones, *Cinefantastique*, September 1983, 21.
[59] Alfred Hitchcock, quoted in Donald Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* (Ballentine Books, 1983), 483.

husky man."[60] Clover responds to this quote, "Pauline is at her very most effective in a state of undress, borne down upon by a blatantly phallic murderer, even gurgling orgasmically as she dies."[61]

In v. 19, Tamar proceeds away from the home of Amnon, in a state of undress, having survived an attack from a sexual monster, screaming. While Tamar leaves with her life, she does not fare better than the female victims of *Psycho*. Robin Wood describes Norman Bates murder of Marion as "the most horrific murder ever shown on screen. Horrific not only in its physical hideousness but in its pointlessness. Marion dies for no reason, victim of the lewd desire of the enslaved to destroy that which is pure and free."[62] The same applies for Amnon's rape of Tamar. After Amnon gets what he desires, he banishes her. He effectively gains nothing by his rape. He does not take her as his wife; he does not gain any more status in the house. He merely takes what he wants and then throws her away into the liminal space of the abject.

Elizabeth Erwin explores the motif of the woman's scream in horror films in her dissertation, "When the Woman Screams: Female Horror as a Reclamation of Space, Agency, and Monstrosity." Erwin argues that the woman's scream in horror is not just an involuntary act of personal fear. Following in the footsteps of Robin Wood, horror illuminates a society's fears. A woman screams because she is afraid but also because of the societal climate in which she finds herself. "The screaming woman is arguably horror film's most enduring motif. Reflecting broader societal attitudes toward gender, her scream is not just noise; it's a visceral, gut-

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[60] Brian De Palma, quoted in William Schoell, *Stay Out of the Shower: 25 Years of Shocker Films Beginning with "Psycho"* (Dembner Books, 1985), 41.

[61] Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws,* 42.

[62] Robin Wood, "Psychoanalysis of *Psycho,*" in *Robin Wood on the Horror Film: Collected Essays and Reviews* (Wayne State University Press, 2018), 7.

punching release that connects the audience to the everyday dangers faced by women."[63] Erwin suggests that the scream is personal as well as political. Screams are not merely reactions to fear but can also denote reactions to grief and pain.

Erwin argues that the woman's scream must be placed within the context of the cultural milieu in which the scream is found. She notes that in the movie *Homicidal*, Marion screams when the villain reveals themselves to be both Emily and Warren are "one person with dual gender presentations." Her screams are personal in that she is within arm's length of a killer but also she is horrified by the gender politics of her day. Erwin goes on to explore screams during the Silent Film era. Erwin suggests that screaming in silent films was not gendered. Men were often seen screaming horrific images while women either screamed with them or reacted heroically. According to Erwin, this is because many of the silent films were often influenced by Suffragettes in the late 19th century.

> Suffragettes saw the potential of movies to help shape public opinion in support of their cause and were quick to adapt to the medium and its storytelling power. Behind the scenes, women could be found working in jobs as varied as set designer, publicity writer, plasterer, molder, casting director, editor, director, and producer, solidifying a presence behind and in front of the camera. These varied contributions in all aspects of filmmaking resulted in an updated characterization of womanhood prevalent on the big screen.[64]

Yet, with the advent of talkies and women's right to vote secured, the majority of screaming began to lay with the female characters. Erwin suggests that the act of screaming is an act of expressing cultural fears. The men scream in the silent era, perhaps because of their fear of the

[63] Elizabeth Erwin, "When the Woman Screams: Gender Politics and the American Horror Film," Horror Homeroom, March 20, 2025, 0:04-0:24.

[64] Erwin, "When the Woman Screams," 9:08.

suffrage movement. Women scream during the talkies because their movement has been taken from them. Women scream during a home invasion because they live in a society where home invasion means rape and murder. Yet the act of screaming also becomes a way of defying the patriarchy around them. "When a woman screams in horror, she is occupying a space of competing cultural categories of acceptable behavior. These vocalizations, whether stemming from fear, anger, grief, or a combination of emotions, resist cultural frameworks that have historically equated 'good' womanhood with quietness."[65] The woman screams because she is horrified by the society that has subjugated them. She screams because she sees society's horrors and can no longer stay silent.

Tamar does not scream because she was brutally raped at the hands of her half-brother. She does not scream in v. 16 after Amnon commands her to leave. Instead, she begs him not to send her away. It is not until v. 19 that she has been dragged out of Amnon's house, the door locked behind her, and her robe is torn. Tamar's scream is both personal and political. She knows what horrors wait for her. There is no future for a princess without her virginity. In v. 12 she asked Amnon where she would carry her shame? Amnon raped her and sent her away. The law gives her no reprieve. The law offers her no comfort. The only revenge for her can be sought by her father. Society does not care for the raped woman, only for the men who love them. She will spend the rest of her life written out of the story, living in abjection in her brother's home. So, she screams.

We, as the audience, scream with her, disgusted by the acts that have been committed and a society that pushes her into the shadows of history as if she were a monster. Certainly, there

[65] Erwin, "When the Woman Screams," 17:45.

must be hope. This is a story about Absalom. He was the first person mentioned in v. 1. He now appears for the first time in the story in v. 20. Yet, what does he do? He tells her to be silent. He asks her not to take this matter to heart. We will discuss Absalom's revenge in the next chapter but for now I feel it is important to sit with Absalom's first reaction to learning of Amnon's crime was to silence the victim. She goes to live in his house and remains desolate, abject for the rest of her days. David does nothing. Absalom sits and waits for two years. Tamar is treated with disgrace. She is a monster in the eyes of her society. Tamar is abject.

The second section of 2 Sam 13 utilizes Kristeva's understanding of the abject to define the character's relationship to ancient Israelite society. In v. 12, Tamar begs Amnon not to rape her. She says "No, my brother, do not rape me; for such a thing is not done in Israel. Do not do this abject thing." I have translated הנבלה הזאת as "this abject thing" to emphasize the societal boundaries that are being crossed in this text. Amnon is not only committing incest but also raping a woman under the protection of his father and brother. This is not a foolish thing but rather an evil that is outside the boundaries of ancient Israelite society. For such a thing is not done in Israel. Tamar continues in v. 13 , calling Amnon like one of the המבלים. The NSRV translates הנבלים as "fools." However, fool fails to capture the monstrous intent of Amnon's actions. Amnon is not a fool; he is a monster. Amnon is abject. Yet, after Amnon rapes Tamar he if filled with anger and disgust at the sight of Tamar. She becomes a monster to him, to frightening to keep in his presence. So, he kicks her out despite the custom that he must marry her. Tamar tears her clothes and cries allowed. Despite being the victim, she has become abject in the eyes of ancient Israelite law. She is a banished woman, condemned to live her life desolate in her brother's house. A monster living in the palace.

Chapter 5: 2 Samuel 13:23-39

A Critical Analysis of 2 Samuel 13:23-39

23. It was after two years; there were sheepshearers in Baal-Hazor which was by Ephraim and Absalom called all the king's sons.

24.Absalom went to the king and he said, "Behold, your servant has sheepshearers; please may the king and his servants go with your servant."

25. The king said to Absalom "No, my son, we will not all go and we will not be a burden to you." He urged him, but he would not go, though he did bless him.

26. Absalom said, "If not, please let my brother Amnon go with us." The king said to him, "Why should he go with you?"

27. Absalom pressed him and David sent Amnon with Absalom and all the sons of the king.

28. Absalom commanded his servants saying "Look, when Amnon's heart is happy with wine and I say to them 'Strike Amnon' then kill him. Do not be afraid, have I not commanded you? Be courageous and be men of power."

29. The servants of Absalom did to Amnon just as Absalom commanded. All the sons of the King rose up, and they each mounted on his mule and they fled.

30. While they were on the road, the report came to David saying, "Absalom slayed all of the sons of the king and not one of them remained."

31. The king rose and he tore his garments, and he lay down on the ground. All of his servants were standing with their clothes torn.

32. But Jonadab, son of Shimeah, brother of David, answered and he said, "My lord, do not say that all the servants of the sons of the king were killed; for Amnon alone died because Absalom has been determined from the day that his sister Tamar was raped.

33. Now, my lord, the king, do not take this matter to heart saying all the sons of the king are dead for Amnon alone is dead."

34. Absalom had fled. The watchman lifted his eyes and behold, many people were coming from the road next to the mountain behind him.

35. Jonadab said to the king. “Behold the sons of the king are coming just as the word of your servant said it would.

36. It came to pass as he said. Behold, the sons of the king came, and they lifted their voices and they wept. And also, the king and all of his servants bawled with intense passion.

37. Absalom flew and he went to Talmai, the son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur. And [David] mourned his son every day.

38. Absalom flew and went to Geshur, and he was there three years.

39. King David longed to go out to Absalom because he was sorry concerning Amnon because he was dead.

The final section of 2 Samuel 13 consists of the revenge portion of this rape-and-revenge story. Absalom concocts a plan to punish those whom Absalom blames for the rape of his sister and Amnon’s current freedom. Absalom invites David and Amnon to celebrate at a sheepshearing festival in Baal-Hazor where he plans to kill them. David refuses to go but Absalom is successful in killing Amnon. David hears of the death of his son and Absalom flees from Israel. Absalom’s revenge is not simply against Amnon, but rather against the entire system that upholds rape culture. This is an attack against his father, David, and the first inklings the readers see of the upcoming rebellion in the following chapters.

The story moves two years into the future after Amnon’s rape of his sister Tamar. Absalom has been steaming in his hatred for Amnon, yet he has done nothing but abide his time. At the same time, David has made no move to hold Amnon accountable for his actions. As far as the narrative is concerned, Amnon has gotten away with his crime without consequence. This is about to change.

Absalom is in possession of sheep at Baal-Hazor near Ephraim. During the time when the sheepshearers shear the sheep, it is customary for a festival to be held.[1] Absalom decided to use this opportunity to enact his revenge on his half-brother, Amnon, for his rape of Tamar. He invites all of the king's sons to attend the festival and extends an invitation to King David himself. David refuses the invitation twice. It is not immediately clear if Absalom predicted that David would reject the invitation or if he originally intended for David to be there. David refuses the invitation and Absalom asks that Amnon attend the festival on David's behalf. After some persuading, David agrees.

Once Absalom and the company reach Baal-Hazor and commence the festival, Absalom orders his servants to kill Amnon once he is drunk with wine. They do. This causes great chaos amongst the festival goers and all of David's sons rise up to flee the festival.

During the chaos, David receives a report that Absalom had killed all of David's sons. In a manner similar to Tamar in v. 19, David rose up and tore his garments and lay on the ground with his servants following in suit. While David is mourning, Jonadab approaches the king and tells him that not all his sons are dead but Amnon alone. Jonadab assures David that Absalom has only killed Amnon because Amnon had raped Tamar two years previously.

The watchguard then saw the people returning from the festival, including David's living sons excluding Absalom. When the sons arrive, they all begin to weep and mourn presumably over the death of Amnon.

Meanwhile, Absalom does not return to Jerusalem but instead flee to Talmai, son of Ammihud, King of Geshur as a refugee. Absalom will stay in Geshur for three years, all the while David mourns over losing Absalom.

[1] See 1 Samuel 25:8.

Second Samuel 13:23-39 flashes the story two years into the future. Verse 22 had left Tamar in the care of her brother Absalom. King David was upset over the rape of his daughter but has failed to do anything about it. The last thing v. 22 tells us before the time jump is that Absalom hated his brother Amnon because he raped his own sister. While much of the story of Absalom's rebellion against his father and short-lived reign over the Kingdom of Israel before his death in 2 Sam 18:14 plays into the greater Succession Narrative, we must remember the Absalom narrative hinges on v.22. Absalom does what he does in chapter 13, leading to his fleeing the kingdom because of his hatred of Amnon.

The second half of Chapter 13 is often not discussed when people look at the rape of Tamar narrative. Scholarship on 2 Samuel 13 either focuses on the ending of the chapter and how it relates to the succession narrative or ignores the Absalom part of the story and simply just focuses on Tamar (13:1-22). Phyllis Trible gives only a couple of sentences to the entire pericope, focusing on David's reaction at the end of chapter 13.[2] Graybill does not offer any commentary on the second half of chapter 13 while still alluding to the previous scholar's proclivity towards reading 2 Samuel 13 as a story about men. "The story of Tamar's rape is narrated in a way that makes it fundamentally a story about men. Tamar is secondary, even in the account of her own rape. And for these men, the aftermath of the rape is messy. Indeed, the rape itself is at once central to the narrative and secondary to it; it is not Tamar, the raped daughter, but Absalom, the wronged brother and beloved son, who is the emotional focus."[3] This passage cannot be understood outside of its context. The readers remember Nathan's prophecy in 2 Sam 12:10, and the reader anticipates Absalom's coming rebellion in the following chapters. Graybill alludes to the slogan, "Women have a past, men have a future." She continues, "and so it is the

[2] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 55.
[3] Graybill, *Texts After Terror*, 42-43.

futures of Amnon, Absalom, and the Davidic monarchy; not the future of the daughter herself, that receive attention from the text."[4] Some other scholars have even gone on to suggest that Amnon's rape of Tamar is only one reason why Absalom murders his brother.

Yamada comments that Absalom's murder of Amnon was not just about revenge but rather a ploy to take the throne by moving up in the line of succession. "Amnon, being David's firstborn (2 Sam 3:2), would be the most likely successor to David's throne. Eliminating Amnon would put Absalom in a better position to possess the kingdom. Thus, when Absalom asks for all of David's sons to gather in one place for the sheepshearing feast, including Amnon the firstborn and the king himself, the reader suspects that Absalom might be planning more than vengeance for his sister."[5]

While it is tempting to believe that Absalom had his sights on the throne of Israel because of his later actions, v.22 dictates that it is out of his hatred for Amnon in which he acts. It seems to me that David's failure to punish Amnon for his rape of Tamar is the first in a list of failures that leads to Absalom's rebellion in 2 Samuel 15. But it is not clear in chapter 13, as Yamada seems to be suggesting, that Absalom already has his eyes on the throne. It is more logical to take the text at its word here and read Absalom's revenge fueled by his love for Tamar and his hatred for Amnon.

Yamada even suggests that Absalom's original invitation to David to come to the festival is proof that Absalom's plan was to usurp the throne. "Later, when Absalom kills Amnon and his plan is revealed, the reader suspects that Absalom had initially intended to kill the king and usurp the throne."[6] On the other hand, Sweeney suggests that Absalom assumed David would reject the

[4] Graybill, *Texts After Terror*, 43.
[5] Yamada, *Configurations of Rape*, 127.
[6] Yamada, *Configurations of Rape*, 128.

invitation; thus, making David's invitation a simple matter of manners. In other words, Absalom invited David because he felt like he needed to but already knew that David would reject the invitation. "Absalom's invitation appears to be innocent, but it is likely that he already knew that David would decline."[7] Yet, Yamada's point is supported by the use of ויפרץ-בו in v. 25 and 27; first urging David to attend and second urging Amnon to attend the festival.[8] This begs the question that if Absalom truly intended for David to stay and Amnon to come then why would Absalom continue to urge David to attend the festival in v. 25?

Yamada addresses this by turning back to the larger context of the passage. For Yamada, Amnon's rape of Tamar must be read in context of Nathan's oracle against David in 2 Sam 12:7-11. "Thus, forces of social fragmentation are put in motion prior to the rape of Tamar through prophetic utterance. The rape acts as an important catalyst for the issues of family rivalry and succession that result. It is the first link in a whole chain of events that works toward the fulfillment of Yahweh's word against David."[9] The rape of Tamar is a link in the chain that characterizes the failures of King David, beginning with David's murder of Uriah and his adultery with Bathsheba.[10] While Yamada is correct to link 2 Samuel 13 with the larger characterization of David throughout the succession narrative, I disagree with his portrayal of Absalom as one focused on his own claim to the throne. Yamada comments, "The verbal sparring between David and Absalom in 13:24-27 is indicative of a growing conflict between father and son. In this way, the narrator, through the story of Amnon's rape of Tamar, has set the

[7] Sweeney, *1–2 Samuel*, 257.

[8] *HALOT*, "פרץ."

[9] Yamada, *Configurations of Rape,* 128.

[10] I am tempted to refer to David's affair with Bathsheba as rape. In today's standards, David clearly has power over her and Bathsheba does not have the power to consent. However, it is not clear if the biblical authors intended for David and Bathsheba's activity as rape. See Schulte's chapter on Bathsheba in *The Absence of God in Biblical Rape Narratives*, 123-140.

reader up for an inevitable power struggle between Absalom and David. Though Absalom's motivation for killing Amnon is framed in the language of revenge by Jonadab (v. 32), the narrator has made it clear that much more is at stake."[11] Thus, Absalom urges David to attend the festival so that Absalom can kill David, not simply as a form of revenge but as a way to obtain the throne.

Yamada has complicated Absalom's motivation for his scheme to get David to the sheep shearing festival. While Absalom will eventually openly rebel against his father for the throne of Israel, in the current pericope, Absalom is motivated by his hatred for Amnon (v. 22). When Jonadab recites the events of the festival to David in v. 32, Jonadab states, כי-אמנון לבדו מת כי-על-פי אבשלום היתה שומה מיום ענתו את תמר אחתו, "For Amnon alone is dead, for Absalom has determined it since the day that he raped his sister." The phrase כי-על-פי (read literally as " for on the mouth of") connotes a sense of foundation for the action. The phrase also appears in Exod. 34:27, "YHWH said to Moses, "'Write these words for in accordance with (כי-על-פי) with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." In Exod. 34:27, YHWH is ordering Moses to write the words down because they are the foundation on which YHWH has entered into a covenant with Israel. In 2 Sam 13:32, Absalom killed Amnon because Amnon raped Tamar. Amnon's rape provides the foundations for Absalom's revenge. Kyle McCarter suggests that the phrase should read כי-על-אף "on account of Absalom's anger" based on the LXX .[12] Thus, Absalom had planned Amnon's murder precisely because of his anger towards Amnon. The entirety of Absalom's rebellion comes back to 13:22. Absalom hated Amnon because he raped his sister.

[11] Yamada, *Configurations of Rape*, 129.
[12] McCarter, *2 Samuel*, 329.

If we are to take Yamada's suggestion that Absalom has his eyes on his father's throne, then we must also accept that Absalom's actions are a direct reaction to his hatred and anger at his brother, Amnon. But these two ideas are not contrary to one another. Yamada seems to suggest that Absalom wants revenge for his sister and also wants the throne. This would suggest that Absalom is using the rape of Tamar as a reason to go after the throne. This is not the case.

Absalom does have his eyes on the throne, but it is precisely because of Amnon's rape of his sister. David's failure to act in v. 21 with any tangible punishment for Amnon forces Absalom to take the matter into his own hands. Absalom will realize that Amnon's death is not enough for justice. When King David neglected his duties to hear Tamar's case, he perpetuated a society that supports the rape of women. Amnon is the monster who raped Tamar, but David helped Amnon get away with it. David is the monster's father. Absalom recognizes this and he will not let David off the hook. Absalom does not come for his father's throne because he has a selfish desire to be king. He is enacting revenge on a society that failed his sister.

David's response to Absalom at the request for Amnon to join in the festival seems peculiar because David once threatened a man for refusing to invite him to the same sheep shearing festival years earlier. In 1 Samuel 25, David and his men come upon a wealthy man in Maon during the sheep shearing season. David sent his men to the wealthy man, Nabal, and requested that he and his men be invited to the festival. Nabal refused saying, "Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?"[13] David responds to Nabal's insult by ordering his men to strap on their swords and head towards Nabal's property. Nabal's wife,

[13] 1 Samuel 25: 10-11, NRSV.

Abigail, hears of David coming and decides to meet David and intercede on behalf of her husband. David agrees to not attack Nabal and his men and retreats. When Abigail goes to tell Nabal what had happened, the festival had already begun and Nabal was already drunk. Abigail waited until the next morning when Nabal was sober. When Nabal heard what his wife did for him, his heart drops and ten days later YHWH strikes him dead. When David heard of Nabal's death, he returns to Abigail and marries her.

Morrison notes that Nabal's name is the same word that Tamar refers to Amnon in 2 Sam13:13. Abigail herself tells David, "Please pay no attention, my lord, to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name — his name means Fool, and folly goes with him."[14] This word has been translated as "scoundrel" or "fool", but I argued above that the term is closely related to Kristeva's idea of the abject. Nabal is not stupid; he is wicked and he meets his fate in the aftermath of the sheep shearing festival. Amnon faces the same fate. Morrison notes four connections between Nabal and the death of Amnon:

1. Both scenes take place during the sheep-shearing season (1 Sam 25:2; 2 Sam 13:24).
2. Nabal and Absalom hold celebrations that are fir for a king (1 Sam 25:36; 2 Sam 13:27).
3. Just before their deaths, Nabal and Amnon have hearts merry with win (1 Sam 25:36; 2 Sam 13:28).
4. Both Nabal and Amnon (labeled a *nabal*) die.[15]

The sheep shearing festival then becomes a representation of David's refusal to protect his daughter, Tamar. In 1 Samuel 25, David insists that Nabal invite his men because they had protected Nabal's men and property while they were in Carmel. Yet Nabal refuses and dies. In 2

[14] 1 Samuel 25: 25, NRSV.
[15] Morrison, *2 Samuel*, 180.

Samuel 13, David refuses to avenge his daughter by failing to punish Amnon and so Amnon is murdered at a sheep shearing festival.

Finally, in 2 Sam 13:28, we reach the point that the audience has been waiting for since Jonadab first hatched his plan. Amnon is finally going to get his comeuppance. The audience is given privy to Absalom's private order to his servants. "Look, when Amnon's heart is happy with wine and I say to them, 'Strike Amnon,' then kill him. Do not be afraid, have I not commanded you? Be courageous and be men of power." The men are to wait till Amnon is drunk and vulnerable, presumably unable to defend himself. He will then be struck by the swords of Absalom's servants. The text does not tell us how many servants strike Amnon, but the plural obviously implies more than one; the term overkill applies to the order. Lastly, Absalom assures his servants that they will not be blamed for their actions; the guilt will fall on Absalom.

Verse 29 simply states, "The servants of Absalom did to Amnon just as Absalom commanded. All the sons of the King rose up, and they each mounted on his mule and they fled." The text glosses over Amnon's death. The violence that the audience has been begging for since Amnon seized Tamar in v. 11 is reduced to "the servants of Absalom did to Amnon just as Absalom commanded." In the same passage that meticulously described how Tamar prepped, kneaded, and baked cakes, we are left with no description of Amnon's death. Morrison notes, "We do not see the victim arrive, sit at table, and begin enjoying the meal as we saw Tamar arrive and begin kneading dough. Tamar was raped onstage. Amnon is killed offstage so that we do not hear a cry for help or an appeal for mercy that could stir feelings of compassion for him. Our sympathies remain with Tamar and her avenging brother."[16] Tamar is allowed to argue, she is allowed to plead, she is allowed to scream; the text gives no such pleasantries to Amnon.

[16] Morrison, *2 Samuel*, 180.

Except, Tamar is not allowed to cry. Absalom quiets her in v. 20. Conversely, David is given several verses to mourn Amnon. While the sons of David were fleeing from Baal-Hazor, David is given a report that all his sons were murdered. David and his servants respond to the false report by tearing their clothes. This is the same verb קרע that describes Tamar tearing her clothes in the wake of Amnon's rape in v. 19.[17] Perhaps this indicates how David should have responded when he heard of what Amnon had done to Tamar. Yet he did not act then and now he acts at the thought of losing all his sons.

The report is false. In a similar fashion to Absalom quieting Tamar in v. 20, Jonadab reappears in the text to quiet David. In v. 20, Absalom tells Tamar אל-תשיתי את-לבך לדבר הזה (lit: do not place your heart to this matter). Jonadab uses a similar phrase to calm David down. אל-ישם אדני המלך אל-לבו דבר (lit: do not place, my lord the king, the word to his heart). Just then, Jonadab is proven correct when the watchman sees the rest of the king's sons approaching from the road. However, David does not stop crying. Once his sons arrive, the king, the king's sons, and all their servants begin to weep bitterly ויבכו וגם-המלך וכל-עבדיו בכו בכי גדול מאד. The verbal root בכה (to weep) appears three times in the phrase, demonstrating the intensity of the characters' lament.[18] It should be noted that while Tamar is quieted and told not to cry, her father and her brothers are granted permission to weep bitterly at the news of her rapist's death. Amnon is mourned while Tamar is silenced.

What of Revenge? 2 Samuel 13:23-29 as Rape-and-Revolt

In her collection of essays analyzing gender in horror films, Clover spends an entire

[17] *HALOT*, "קרע."
[18] *HALOT*, "בכה."

chapter on the rape-and-revenge horror films that were quite popular in the 70s and 80s.[19] Clover discusses low-budget, gritty exploitation films such as *The Last House on the Left* (which is a modernized retelling of Ingmar Bergman's 1960 film *The Virgin Spring*), *I Spit On Your Grave, Straw Dogs,* and *Ms. 45*. These movies all follow a similar plot that defines the rape-and-revenge structure. Someone, usually a woman, is raped and left for dead. That rape is then avenged either by a loved one as in *The Virgin Spring* and *The Last House on the Left* or by the raped woman as in *I Spit on Your Grave* and *Ms. 45.* The Rape-and-Revenge story consists of a rape and a subsequent revenge of that rape. Jacinda Read notes that the rape-and-revenge story is not a genre or subgenre itself but a plot structure.[20] Rape-and-Revenge films are found across genres such as Westerns (*Dirty Harry*), dark comedy (*Promising Young Woman*), action (*Revenge*), horror (*I Spit on Your Grave*), and drama (*Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*). While rape and revenge stories have been a common plot in cinema, it became popular in the 70s in the wake of the women's sexual revolution. Read notes, "the rape-revenge cycle might usefully be read as one of the ways in which Hollywood has attempted to make sense of feminism and the changing face of heterosexuality in the post-1970 period."[21] These films quickly become commentaries on the patriarchal structures.

Barbara Creed offers a chapter on women as "*femme castratrice*" in her book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*.[22] Clover points focus on movies where the woman is the one who is exacting revenge for their own rape. In these films, the violence that the raped woman enacts is portrayed to be as brutal as the rape itself. Further, these films are full

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[19] Clover*, Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, 114-65.

[20] Jacinda Read, *The New Avengers: Feminism, Femininity, and the Rape-Revenge Cycle* (Manchester University Press, 2000), 25.

[21] Read, *The New Avengers*, 241.

[22] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 1992), 122-38.

of the male gaze. The rape scenes are often long and drawn out full of images of the woman's naked and bruised body. Then the revenge itself often depicts the women using their own sexuality to get their revenge. It is not lost on Clover that the directors of these films are male. "Why is it that male directors are interested in making films, albeit horror films, about male castration? Why is the *femme castratrice*, one of the more deadly personae adopted by the monstrous-feminine, almost always represented as fulfilling a stereotypical image of female beauty? For she clearly comes across as a modern-day version of the ancient Sirens."[23] The male gaze does not stop with the rape of the woman, but it becomes a part of the woman's revenge.

In a sense, the woman is taking control of her sexuality, something that these women did not have at the beginning of the film. The women in early Rape-and-Revenge films tend to begin as virginal, bookish types. They are not sexual creatures until they are raped. But once they are raped and reborn, they now use their sexuality as a weapon to exact their revenge. In *I Spit on Your Grave*, Jennifer lays a trap for one of her victims by approaching him in a sheer, almost translucent dress. She lures her victim into the trap with her sexuality. Once the victim is in place, she turns violent.[24] Later, Jennifer seduces Johnny to go back to her cabin where they can have sex. Johnny, believing that Jennifer really wanted it all along, follows Jennifer back to the cabin where she gives him a bath. The bath leads to Jennifer pleasing Johnny with her hand. As Johnny climaxes, Jennifer grabs a knife and castrates him.[25] She has removed the rapist from his weapon. Yet, in the context of these films the woman has become monstrous. "Nevertheless, *I Spit on Your Grave* is still misogynistic in its representation of women. It is important to note

[23] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 128.

[24] "Jennifer Murders Matthew," *I Spit on Your Grave*, directed by Meir Zarchi (1978; Cinemagic Pictures, 2022), DVD.

[25] "Bathtub Scene," *I Spit on Your Grave*.

that the scenes in which Jennifer carries out her revenge are deliberately eroticized. Woman is monstrous because she castrates, or kills, the male during coition."[26]

The film ends with Jennifer finding and killing the remainder of her rapists. She is victorious but the audience is not given a chance to cheer and celebrate her victory. As soon as the last rapist is dispatched, the film shows Jennifer riding off on a motorboat. The camera focuses on her face. She does not allow herself to smile nor does she celebrate. She seems to ponder the violence she has just inflicted and the transformation she has undergone.

The 1981 film, *Ms. 45* directed by Abel Ferrara, tells the story of a mute seamstress named Thana living in New York City. One day on her way home from work, she is raped by a masked gunman (played by Abel Ferrara himself).[27] The man leaves her disheveled but alive.[28] She then returns to her apartment to find that a burglar has broken in. The burglar rapes her at gunpoint. During the rape, Thana manages to grab a paper weight and uses it to kill her rapist. Thana, unsure of what to do with the body, cuts it into pieces and leaves sections of the body in different trashcans around the city.[29]

Further, Thana decides to take her revenge. Since she has no way of tracking down the masked rapist and the second rapist is already dead, she begins going out at night, waiting for men to cross a line, and then killing them. She kills a guy who is standing on a corner catcalling girls, she kills a guy who tries to take her back to her place, she kills a pimp who is beating one of his prostitutes, and she kills a Saudi businessman who offers to buy her for the night. Thana attends a Halloween party dressed as a nun (perhaps a callback to Jennifer who goes to a chapel

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[26] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 129.

[27] Alexandra Heller-Nicholas, *Rape-Revenge Films: A Critical Study* (McFarland, 2011), 42.

[28] "Initial Rape," *Ms. 45,* directed by Abel Ferrara (1981; Navaron, 2018), streaming on Shudder.

[29] "Thana Survives Her Second Attack," *Ms. 45.*

in black and white in *I Spit On Your Grave*). She attends the party with her creepy boss. At the party she shoots her boss, then goes downstairs and opens fire on all the male partygoers. One of her female coworkers grabs a knife and sneaks up behind her. The shot shows Thana in the foreground, still dressed as a nun, aiming her .45 pistol. In the background is her female coworker brandishing a knife over her pelvis.[30] The knife is obviously phallic. The coworker stabs Thana in the back. Thana turns around, shocked, and perhaps feeling betrayed that a woman has stopped her.

Thana's revenge in *Ms. 45* goes beyond the simplicity of the basic woman is raped and the rapists get what is coming to them in *I Spit On Your Grave.* Instead, one rapist gets away with his crime, and the other rapist is killed within the first few minutes of the film. Thana's revenge is thus on all the men of New York. The open scene of the film shows the four seamstresses walking down the busy sidewalks of New York City after work. They are ogled and catcalled by a never-ending gauntlet of men. New York City acts as villain itself in the film.[31] There are no innocent men in *Ms. 45*.

Thana has become a much-celebrated representation of the *femme fatale* in the Rape-and-Revenge films. Her muteness is a grave reminder of how society silences the voice of the raped woman. Tamar, herself, is silenced by her own brother in 2 Sam 13:20. Yet, Thana also uses her muteness to lure men into her traps. Heller-Nicholas states, "Her muteness also compounds the mythic quality of her ordeal — it makes literal the taboo of un-speakability of rape and personifies the inability to articulate the sheer scope of female oppression.… Her silence represents her literal inability to speak up for herself. As *femme fatale*, however, Thana takes control, and her silence becomes a weapon — instead of a weakness, it enigmatically emphasizes

[30] "Halloween Party Scene," *Ms. 45.*
[31] "The Seamstresses Walk Down the Streets of New York," *Ms. 45*.

the force of her physical presence.'"[32] Thana evolves from the meek, quiet seamstress and turns into a sexual woman enacting violence on the slimy, gritty city of New York.

Thana's revenge is not specifically on the men who raped her but all the men of New York City. Her revenge is against the patriarchal society that allows the men who catcall her, who ogle her, and who rape her. It does not matter to Thana if the man has assaulted Thana herself. If the man has crossed a line with any female, then they meet her qualifications to be killed. There is a scene in China-town, where the man simply kisses his girlfriend while she protests that she needs to go back to work. The man does not rape or assault his girlfriend. He simply goes in for one too many kisses. This triggers Thana to pursue the man all the way back to his apartment.[33] She reveals her gun and takes aim at the man, but he escapes in the nick of time. The film shows him mercy where Thana was not willing to give him any

Still the ending does not celebrate Thana. Rather, she is rejected by the women of New York who are horrified by her massacre of the men attending the Halloween party. Her friend, the coworker who stabs her, brandishes the knife in a phallic way, as if the woman becomes a man in order to rape Thana again.

The idea of a woman burning down a society in order to avenge her own rape is even found in Sumerian literature. The tale of Inana and Šu-kale-tuda recounts a story of a gardener's boy who discovers Inana sleeping in his garden. The boy, Šu-kale-tuda, rapes Inana while she is sleeping. When she awakens, she discovers what has happened and promises to avenge herself. She does this by punishing the entire land. "Then the woman was considering what should be destroyed because of her genitals; Inana was considering what should be done because of her genitals. She filled the wells of the Land with blood, so it was blood that the irrigated orchards of

[32] Heller-Nicholas, *Rape-Revenge Films*, 43.
[33] "Chinatown," *Ms. 45*.

the Land yielded, it was blood that the slave who went to collect firewood drank, it was blood that the slave girl who went out to draw water drew, and it was blood that the black-headed people drank."[34]

Upon seeing the punishment for the land, Šu-kale-tuda goes to his father and admits everything. His father encourages him to leave the mountains and live among the black-headed people. Inana continues her revenge by causing a giant dust storm and then blocking an important highway. Finally, Inana goes to her father Enki at Abzu of Erigdug and asks him for help.[35] Enki agrees with him and Inana becomes so big that she stretches across the entire sky. Šu-kale-tuda tries to make himself little but Inana finds him. She curses him to be remembered forever as a rapist. "So! You shall die! What is that to me? Your name, however, shall not be forgotten. Your name shall exist in songs and make the sons sweet. A young singer shall perform them most pleasingly in the king's palace. A shepherd shall sing them sweetly as he tumbles his butter churn. A shepherd boy shall carry your name to where he grazes at the sheep. The palace of the desert shall be your home."[36] Šu-kale-tuda is destined to be remembered forever as a rapist.

Inana finds her assailant but before she finds him, she enacts three plagues among the land. She fills the land with blood, she covers the land in a dust storm, and she blocks an important highway. To the innocent bystander, Inana is a monster who evokes a monstrous form in the end to finally find Šu-kale-tuda. She stretches her body across the entire sky, blocking the wind paths to find one singular man. "With that holy Inana went out from the Abzu of Eridug. She stretched herself like a rainbow across the sky and thereby reached as far as the earth. She let

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[34] Jeremy Black et al., *The Literature of Ancient Sumer* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 200-201.

[35] Black et al., *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, 203.

[36] Black et al., *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, 205.

the south wind pass across; she let the north wind pass across. From fear, Šu-kale-tuda tried to make himself as tiny as possible, but the woman had found him among the mountains."[37] This description of Inana's transformation from a goddess to a massive being covering the entire sky turns her into a monstrified version of herself. Inana who was once the size of a woman that Šu-kale-tuda could rape, is now the size of the entire sky.

Noel Carroll refers to the enlargement of a normal-sized object into a massive version of the same thing as massification.[38] In the 50s we saw movies like *Them!* with giant ants, *Tarantula* with a giant tarantula, or perhaps more relevant, *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (1958). Šu-kale-tuda cowers in fear. Inana is no longer the weak and vulnerable woman sleeping in his garden but is now a monster in search of vengeance and there is nowhere else to hide. She has her sights on him, and he must pay the price.

Not all Rape-and- Revenge stories recount tales where the raped woman is the one enacting revenge. In the 1960 film *Jungfrukallan* (*The Virgin Spring*), the story recounts a prosperous farm owner in medieval Sweden. The man, Töre, sends his daughter, Karin, on an errand to take candles to a nearby church. On her way to the church, she is confronted by three herdsmen, two men and a boy. The older men rape and kill Karin.[39] The boy tries to bury her body but is unable.

Later, by chance, the herdsmen end up seeking shelter from the cold at Töre's farm. They are given food and a place to sleep. During the night Töre and his wife discover what has happened to Karin. Overcome with rage, Töre murders the three herdsmen. He stabs one of the men and throws the other into a fire. Töre does not show mercy to the boy; he lifts him over his

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[37] Black et al., *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, 204.

[38] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 50.

[39] "Rape Scene," *The Virgin Spring*, directed by Ingmar Bergman (1960, Svensk Filmindustri, 2018), DVD.

head and slams him across the room.[40] His wife, Märeta, is horrified. Töre looks at his hands and begs for God's forgiveness. They then go and find where Karin's body was left and Töre vows to build a church where Karin's body laid as a form of atonement for his own bloodlust. Bergman does not allow the audience to celebrate Töre's revenge. Instead, Töre and the audience complicate the violence sought in the name of revenge.[41]

Twelve years later, Wes Craven released his retelling of *The Virgin Spring* and called it *The Last House on the Left*. In this film, Craven changes its location from a farm in medieval Europe to a suburb in 1970s America. 17-year-old Mari Collingwood is not taking candles to a church but attending a concert in the city with her friend Phyllis. Once in the city, they attempt to buy marijuana from a man named Junior. Junior leads them back to an apartment where they encounter Weasel, Sadie, and Junior's sadistic father, Krug.[42] The group of four are all recently escaped convicts and trap Mari and Phyllis, throw them in the trunk of their car and take the two girls into the woods. Once they are in the woods, the two girls are assaulted, raped, and murdered.[43]

After the murder, the group pretends to be traveling salesmen in search of a place to stay. They end up at the Collingwood's home. During the night, Estelle Collingwood discovers Mari's bloody clothes and a necklace that belonged to Mari in Junior's possession. Estelle and John go into the woods, find Mari's body and decide to take revenge.[44] One-by-one, they kill each of the four gang members. John kills Krug by attacking him with a chainsaw. Just as John kills Krug,

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[40] "Töre takes his revenge," *The Virgin Spring.*

[41] "Töre builds a church," *The Virgin Spring.*

[42] "Mari and Phyllis in the City," *The Last House on the Left*, directed by Wes Craven (1972, Alliance Home Entertainment, 2020), DVD.

[43] "Mari and Phyllis are raped and murdered," *The Last House on the Left*.

[44] "Estelle and John discover Mari's body," *The Last House on the Left*.

the police enter the house and are horrified by the massacre they see. The film ends with John, just like Töre, looking at his hands and wondering what he has done.[45]

These Rape-and-Revenge stories show us horrific rape scenes, causing us to want to see the rapists avenged. But when we finally get the vengeance that we want, the story questions whether the avenger has become a monster on their journey for blood. "In *The Last House on the Left*, violence begets more violence, and an assumption that 'good' will triumph over 'evil' has been exposed as naive in the world in which it is set… Any sense of victory is denied by the speed and impact with which it collides with the harsh realization that the Collingwoods are now killers themselves."[46] Whether it be Inana afflicting blood and storms upon the entire land, or John Collingwood brandishing a chainsaw, has vengeance made them monsters?

In 2022, Barbara Creed released her follow-up to her important work *The Monstrous-Feminine*, titled *Return of the Monstrous-Feminine: Feminist New Wave Cinema*. In it, she dedicates an entire chapter to modern-day rape-and-revenge films that have been released in the wake of the #MeToo movement. Her chapter "#MeToo—Rape and Revolt" focuses on three films: *Promising Young Woman* (2020), *Revenge* (2017) and *The Nightingale* (2018).[47] While the latter two films were written before the #MeToo movement, all three underwent postproduction and releases after the #MeToo movement gained prominence in 2017.

In her study, Creed looks at what she calls Feminist New Wave Cinema that emerged in the new millennium. Rape-and-Revenge films, under the branch of Feminist New Wave Cinema, move away from the personal, intimate revenge of the films of the 70s and 80s and branch out as an attack on rape culture. Creed refers to these as rape-revolt films. "In Feminist New Wave

[45] "Final Scene," *The Last House on the Left*.
[46] Heller-Nicholas, *Rape-Revenge Films*, 38.
[47] Creed, *Return of the Monstrous-Feminine,* 51-67.

Cinema, although the female protagonist seeks revenge at a personal level, directors depict her goal, not as revenge but as revolt, that is, revolt against structure of the patriarchal symbolic order."[48] For Creed, these films move past the simplicity of the rape-and-revenge plot structure, but go on to critique the system at large that allows for rape.

Creed lists four characteristics of the rape-revolt genre:

1. The male rapist is depicted as abject.
2. The avenging woman who seeks justice is portrayed as heroic instead of monstrous.
3. The directors of the films set out to critique the rape-revenge genre through filmic language used to depict rape.
4. These films focus on revolting against the patriarchal systems and lead to change and transformation.[49]

Creed focuses on a quote from Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, in which Kristeva defines abjection as something that messes with the established order of things. In it, Kristeva uses the "shameless rapist" as an example. Creed notes, "Kristeva specifically singles out the 'shameless rapist' as monstrous and abject. His crime is about power in that it potentially destroys the victim's sense of self, her identity.… Rape is an act of colonization. It is designed to keep women in their place and is enacted in such a way that the woman finds it extremely difficult to seek justice."[50] In Creed's understanding of Feminist New Wave Cinema, rape is not personal but political. Rape is a part of a much larger system as a whole. The rapist is but a part of a larger scheme at work. I would argue that *Ms. 45* is a precursor to Creed's understanding of rape culture because Thana is not simply going after her rapist but all the males in New York

[48] Creed, *Return of the Monstrous-Feminine*, 52.
[49] Creed, *Return of the Monstrous-Feminine,* 52-54.
[50] Creed, *Return of the Monstrous-Feminine*, 52.

City, who perpetuate rape culture.[51] Despite this nod to rape culture, at the end of *Ms. 45*, Thana is portrayed as a monster and killed for it.

Promising Young Woman follows Cassie, a medical school dropout who lives with her parents and works at a coffee shop. Years earlier, Cassie's lifelong best friend, Nina, was raped at a party while the two women were in medical school. Nina, traumatized by the incident, takes her own life. Flash forward to the present day, Cassie spends her nights going to bars and clubs, pretending to be passed out drunk, and waits for someone to take advantage of her. When a man inevitably does so, she reveals that she is in fact sober and enacts her revenge.[52] Eventually, Cassie hears that Nina's rapist, Alexander Monroe, is in town celebrating his bachelor party. Cassie shows up at the party, dressed as a stripper. She offers to give Alexander a dance upstairs in private.[53] While she has him alone, she attempts to kill him, but Alexander gets the upper hand and kills her. The movie ends at Alexander's wedding which is crashed by a bunch of policemen. Apparently, Cassie had set up for the evidence of Nina's rape to be released to the cops in the instant that she failed to kill Alexander herself.

Throughout the film, Cassie approaches several people in her search for Alexander. She confronts Alexander's lawyer, men who watched the rape but did nothing, the Dean of the medical school who did not follow up on Nina's claim, Nina's friend who did not believe her story, and those who watched the rape happen on video. Cassie is not simply set on punishing Alexander but the entire system that allowed him to get away with it. "[Cassie's] personal journey into abjection and her questioning of everything transforms revenge into a full-scale

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[51] *Ms. 45.*

[52] "Opening Scene," *Promising Young Woman*, directed by Emerald Fennell (Focus Features, 2020), film.

[53] "Bachelor Party Scene," *Promising Young Woman*.

revolt. Cassie holds everyone responsible so that when her own death occurs, what happens to Cassie stands as a stark warning to others that women will no longer sit quietly by while rape culture flourishes."[54] For Cassie, this is not a revenge story for her friend Nina, but a full rebellion against rape culture.

Creed then turns to 2017's *Revenge*. This film depicts Jennifer, a young wannabe, aspiring model from Los Angeles, accompanying her married boyfriend, Richard, for a private getaway in the desert. Director Coralie Fargeat focuses the camera on Jennifer's young, sultry body. Jennifer knows her place in this world and uses it to get what she wants. "When they arrive at the house, as she moves from room to room, the camera makes it clear that she is performing her assigned role of beautiful sex object. This is what gives Richard pleasure, and she is happy to oblige."[55] The next morning, Richard's friends, Stan and Dimitri, arrive a day early for a hunting trip. Richard is annoyed but decides to play host. The four spend the rest of the day partying. At night, Jennifer, the lone woman at the private estate, performs a sexy dance in her bikini, choosing to dance with Stan when Richard refuses to dance.[56]

The next morning, Jennifer wakes up to find that Richard has headed into town to get hunting licenses while Dimitri is nursing a hangover. Stan attempts to seduce Jennifer but when she refuses, he rapes her. Dimitri walks in on them during the rape but decides to turn a blind eye.[57] While traditional rape-and-revenge cinema films the rape scene with the male gaze, Fargeat abandons the male gaze that she utilizes in the first act of the film. Rather, she focuses on Jennifer's face as she is raped.

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[54] Creed, *Return of the Monstrous-Feminine*, 57.

[55] Creed, *Return of the Monstrous-Feminine*, 57-58.

[56] "Dance Scene," *Revenge*, directed by Coralie Fargeat (Neon, 2017), streaming on Shudder.

[57] "Rape Scene," *Revenge.*

> The rape scene isn't clearly shown. Fargeat sets out to block what Laura Mulvey famously described as "the male gaze". By not showing the rape scene, Fargeat denies any opportunity for the male spectator to derive pleasure from the scene or to project his "fantasy" onto the "female figure." What we see instead is Jennifer's face roughly pressed into glass, as we hear her frantic screams and witness Stand in long shot as he subjects Jennifer to anal penetration. What we are most painfully aware of is Jennifer's fear, as her face registers the horror of the rape. Fargeat carefully subverts a male gaze for which the conventional rape-revenge film has been criticized.[58]

After the rape, Richard returns from his trip into town to discover what his friends have done to his mistress. Yet he does not become angry at what he discovers. He seems as if he expected his friends to oblige themselves into the snack that he left behind. When he confronts Jennifer about the abuse that has come upon her, he takes his friend's side. Richard defends his friend and Jennifer flees into the desert. The three men track her down to the edge of a cliff and Richard pushes her off a cliff where she is impaled on a tree.[59] Jennifer is able to free herself, clean her wounds, and kill the three men, one by one. In the middle of the film, Jennifer cleans her wounds by burning an aluminum Mexican beer can onto her wound. The beer can leaves the imprint of a phoenix burned onto her skin. Jennifer is symbolically reborn as a phoenix.[60] Fargeat continues to focus the camera on Jennifer's body. Her body no longer represents a sex object to be used by men but a warrior revolting against those who hurt her. "*Revenge* is in revolt against sexist filmmaking practices. Fargeat undermines the male gaze and the sadistic voyeurism of traditional rape-revenge films and by extension the cinematic sexual objectification of female characters."[61] *Revenge* is a movie that is in revolt against the Rape-and-Revenge genre itself.

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[58] Creed, *Return of the Monstrous-Feminine*, 58-59.
[59] "Richard Attempts to Kill Jennifer," *Revenge*.
[60] "Jennifer's Rebirth," *Revenge*.
[61] Creed, *Return of the Monstrous-Feminine,* 60-61.

The final film that Creed examines under her Feminist New Wave Cinema rape-revolt films is 2018's *The Nightingale*. The film is set in Tasmania in 1825 where an Irish female convict, Clare, lives out her punishment under the charge of Lieutenant Hawkins. Clare has finished her seven-years sentence, yet Lieutenant Hawkins refuses to let her go. Hawkins keeps her around and makes her sing for his men every night and rapes her at his will.[62] Despite all of this, Clare has been allowed to marry and has a young baby. One day, Clare's husband confronts Hawkins who does not take kindly to his disrespect. Hawkins comes to Clare's house with two men where they kill Clare's husband and take turns raping her.[63] In the midst of the violence, one of Hawkins's men kills Clare's baby.

The next day, Hawkins, his men, and a Palawa (Indigenous people of Tasmania) guide leave for a town on the other side of Tasmania. Clara hires another Palawa guide named Billy to track down the men. Over the course of the movie, Clare and Billy begin to get along and relate over the brutal oppression each has experienced from the British overseers. "*The Nightingale* begins as a tale of revenge but broadens into one of revolt as the two protagonists share the same realization that what is happening to them is part of a wider story of colonization and injustice."[64] The film is a rape-revenge story in the sense that a character is raped and the central plot focuses on avenging that rape. But the film moves into a much larger story about how the Irish and Palawa were treated by the English. Rape becomes just a part of the injustice that Clare and Billy experience. Their journey becomes a revolt against the racist system that plagues both Clare and Billy.

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[62] "Clare Sings for the Men," *The Nightingale*, directed by Jennifer Kent (IFC Films, 2018), streaming on Shudder.

[63] "Hawkins Rapes Clare," *The Nightingale.*

[64] Creed, *Return of the Monstrous-Feminine*, 63.

What does Creed's Feminist New Wave Cinema teach us about 2 Samuel 13? Creed's understanding of the rape-revenge genre in Feminist New Wave Cinema comes through the lens of the #MeToo movement that became popular in 2017. Obviously, the writer of 2 Samuel 13 had no such anachronistic influence. But Creed's idea of rape and revolt is intriguing in light of the coming conflict. Absalom's murder of Amnon is his first step into open revolt against his father.

Creed argues that there are four markers of rape-revolt movies. The first qualification is that the male rapist is depicted as abject. As I argued above, הנבלים in 2 Sam 13:13 should be translated with the abject in mind. The הנבלים are monsters standing outside of proper society. Tamar calls Amnon one of the abject in her plea to stop Amnon. "You will be like one of the monsters in Israel."

Creed's second qualification for rape-and-revolt stories is that the avenger is depicted as heroic in their revolt against rape culture. While in movies like *The Last House on the Left* and *Ms. 45*, the avenger is depicted as violent, monstrous, and in some cases as regretting their actions; in Feminist New Wave Cinema the avenger is depicted as heroic. This could be a point of contention for how Absalom is depicted in 2 Samuel 13 because his murder of Amnon is not cheered on by David nor his brothers. In fact, his brothers initially run from him while his father mourns Amnon's death. The audience yearns for Absalom to be praised as a hero,
but the Biblical text does not give us this reprieve. Absalom will become a hero in the eyes of the people, but this heroic status will be short-lived. Eventually, he will die the death of a monster, hanging by his hair.

However, the chapter ends with David yearning for Absalom to return in v. 39. The text suggests that after David was done mourning Amnon, he began to miss Absalom. Chapter 14

shows David's love for Absalom as his yearning for his return convinces Joab to act in bringing Absalom back to him. David forgives Absalom in chapter 14 and Absalom will be depicted as one who speaks for the people in chapter 15. Of course, Absalom's revolt against David ultimately fails and Absalom will be depicted not as a hero but as a monster as he hangs from a tree in chapter 18. The tale of Absalom's revolt is complicated and worth much more space than the purview of this dissertation. The text portrays Absalom as both a hero and a monster throughout his revolt. On the one hand, Absalom is depicted as speaking for the people. On the other hand, Absalom rapes David's *pilagshim* in chapter 16 verse 22. Absalom is both a hero and a monster. Was his murder of Amnon justified? Perhaps, yes. Does he become a monster himself once he gains power over his father's kingdom? This is a bigger question for further research.

Creed's third qualification for her rape-revolt genre is that the films critique the rape-and-revenge films that came before the turn of the millennium. Obviously, 2 Samuel 13 cannot comment on films that won't exist for several millennia after the Deuteronomist first compiled these stories. However, I will note that in relation to the other rape-and-revenge stories of the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 34 and Judges 19), 2 Samuel 13 depicted the vengeance in the best light. In Genesis 34, the sons of Jacob destroy an entire city and are met with disgust from Jacob upon their return.[65] Jacob responds to the actions of his sons by scorning them and comparing them to monsters. "Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, 'You have brought trouble on me by making me odious to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my numbers are few, and

[65] I have previously written about Genesis 34 as a rape-and-revenge story. In it, the sons of Jacob avenge the rape of their sister Dinah by killing all the men of the city of Shechem. Upon their return, Jacob is disgusted by their actions. The sons respond, "Should we have let him treat our sister like a whore?" Thus, the story asks the reader to decide if the sons of Jacob were justified or not. See Leland Merritt, "The Monster Within: Rape and Revenge in Genesis 34," in *Religion, Culture, and the Monstrous: Of Gods and Monsters*, ed. Natasha L. Mikles and Joseph P. Laycock (Lexington Books, 2021) 213-234.

if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household.'"[66] The term for *odious* is the same term that is used to describe the rotting fish after the Nile is dried in Exod. 7:18.[67] The image here connects with Carroll's understanding of the monstrous.

For Carroll, the monster must induce fear and disgust. Jacob is claiming that the actions of his sons will not only induce fear in the Canaanites who will certainly hear of their ransacking of Shechem, but this action will also induce disgust in them. "The root באש is used in the Hebrew Bible to describe the rotting flesh of dead fish and spoiled food. Jacob's description here is to conjure up the image of dead flesh baking in the hot sun. Images of Dracula's cold flesh, the rotting corpses of zombies, or Frankenstein's bolted-together beast convey horror. They are both threatening and disgusting."[68] Jacob does not speak at all in Genesis 34 until v. 30. When he does speak his concern is not with his daughter who was raped and forced to live with her rapists. Instead, he is worried about what the other people of Canaan will worry. In Jacob's mind, his sons have turned them into monsters in the eyes of the Canaanites. This threatens the Jacobite's ability to seek favor and trade with the other Canaanites, but his sons do not agree. They will not stand for their sister to be treated in such a manner. The text does not tell us who is correct. It leaves the reader to ponder the situation and decide for themselves. Rape-and-Revolt stories do not give space for these questions. A Rape-and-Revolt story would not only side with the sons of Jacob, but it would also go on to punish any Canaanites who would agree with the rape culture embodied in the prince of Shechem.

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[66] Genesis 34:30, NSRV.
[67] *HALOT*, "באש."
[68] Merritt, "The Monsters Within," 256.

In Judges 19, the man allows for his *pilegesh* to be raped. Once he finds her, he chops her body into 12 pieces. Tammi Schneider notes the Levite's lack of care towards the brutalized woman in Judges 19.

> The text continues to emphasize the man's insensitivity by his reaction to her abused body…The point is clear by the way this verse is narrated is that the man did not express any remorse, nor did he feel responsible for her plight. He made no attempt to save her from the fate to which he threw her. There is no indication that he would have sought her out had she not been lying there. He felt no need to 'talk to her heart,' or even ask her how she was.[69]

The Hebrew is not clear whether she dies by gang rape or if the man kills her when he chops her up. As far as rape-and-revenge stories go in the Hebrew Bible, 2 Samuel 13 at least gives voice to Tamar.

Creed's final qualification is that the films focus on revolt. Creeds states, "Rape-revolt films deplore abject masculinity while applauding the woman who, as the monstrous-feminine, revolts against his abject deeds."[70] The question begs if Absalom's revolt against David is born of Abasalom's hatred of the abject Amnon. As I have argued above, Absalom does not see Amnon's rape of his sister, Tamar, as a singular crime. Rather, Absalom is interested in bringing the whole system to the ground. It is why Absalom invites David to go to the sheep-shearing festival. David did not punish Amnon; thus, he did not avenge his own daughter. In Absalom's eyes, David is complicit in a rape culture that must be brought down. But Absalom is no hero. He participates in rape himself in 16:22. Absalom will die a monster in chapter 18 and David will go on to be the namesake of the House of Judah.

Perhaps, it is too much to think of 2 Samuel 13 as a feminist text. The woman is silenced and the avenger goes on to be a monster himself. Yet, Creed's idea of rape-revolt cinema may

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[69] Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry (Liturgical Press, 2000), 280.

[70] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine,* 54.

help us understand 2 Samuel 13 a bit better. While Absalom is ultimately a flawed, and at times monstrous, character, he is driven by a desire to revolt against a system that has abandoned Tamar. His revolt begins as a gallant effort against a rape culture that allowed with Amnon to commit his crime and get away without any admonishment from his father, the King of Israel. Yet Absalom is also a part of that system. He is the one who quiets Tamar in 2 Sam 13:20. Absalom revolts against the king and the system that let Amnon live, but he fails to destroy the rape culture that allowed Amnon to flourish in the first place. Tamar left a victim, a prisoner of society, desolate in the house of Absalom. Tamar deserves her vengeance. Amnon deserves to be punished. But David and Absalom both fail her. The last we hear of Tamar is v. 20, ושממה בית אבשלום אחיה, "she was desolate in the house of Absalom, her brother." There Tamar sits, abject in her brother's house. Any vengeance offered her will be swept away by Absalom's own monstrosity.

2 Sam 13:23-29 describes the revenge portion of the text. Absalom enacts his revenge by ordering his servants to kill Amnon. Absalom's revenge was not just against Amnon who raped his sister but also against King David who failed neither protect Tamar nor punish Amnon. 2 Sam 13 is better understood as a rape-and-revolt text. In these stories, it is not enough to punish the rapist but to go after the entire system that perpetuates rape culture. This is why Absalom invites David to the sheep-shearing festival and it is why Absalom eventually rebel against his father. This is not simply because Absalom seeks the throne for himself but because he blames his father for Tamar's current situation. Horror holds up a mirror to a society and reflects back a culture's fears. 2 Sam 13 does this by showing that even the King is holding up a system that endangers the women of ancient Israel and protects those who harm the women. Tamar claimed

that such a thing does not happen in Israel, but it did. If it can happen to the daughter of the king then it can happen to anyone.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This dissertation has taken the foundations of horror studies and used horror as a lens to read 2 Samuel 13. In this story, Tamar is raped by her half-brother, Amnon. The story depicts Amnon as a monster, stalking Tamar as she walks around his house. Yet it is Tamar's wise words to Amnon after he has grabbed her that strikes at the heart of the passage. Tamar looks at Amnon and says, "No, my brother, for such a thing is not done in Israel" (2 Samuel 13:12). Tamar is using abjection as a threat to keep her brother from raping her. Amnon does not care. He rapes her anyway, to the horror of the audience. Tamar's statement that such a thing does not happen in Israel plays to the anxieties of ancient Israel. Rape is not a crime that can be tolerated in ancient Israel. That is for the Shechemites in Genesis 34 or the Gibionites of Judges 19. But what if the call was coming from inside the house?[1] What if the monsters lived in the palace? David takes Uriah's wife and then kills Uriah to cover it up in 2 Samuel 11. Now, the prince is raping the princess in chapter 13 and Absalom will overthrow his father's right and go on to rape David's *pilagshim* in chapter 16.

Brandon Grafius writes, "The primary reason to apply theories of horror to the Bible is the same reason we study horror in the first place: horror films reveal a tremendous amount about our fears and anxieties."[2] Grafius goes on to recount Freud's view of horror as individual repression as we grow older and leave previous life stages behind. Wood takes the foundation of Freud and applies it to society at large. Wood argues that societies deal with their anxieties and cultural fears by categorizing those fears into the other. "Otherness represents that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with in one of two ways: either by

[1] The line "The call is coming from inside the house" was first uttered in *When a Stranger Calls*, directed by Fred Walton (Columbia Pictures, 1979).

[2] Grafius, "Horror and Bible (Six Theses)," 32.

rejecting and if possible, annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it."[3] The horror stories that a culture tells reflects the cultural anxieties of that particular culture's time and place. Humans create monsters out of those they do not understand and those who go against societal norms.

Society's monsters are those that are rejected by society at large, those that are other. Cultures have made monsters of things they do not understand, such as homosexuals and wise women. Cultures turned them into vampires and witches. On the other hand, there are monsters among us, creeping in the shadows in the forms of violent criminals and maniacs. Julia Kristeva sums up this idea in her essays on abjection. "What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite — the traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior, any crime…is abject, but premediated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of [the fragility of society]."[4] The abject is that which is outside the boundaries of societal norms. The abject is other; the abject is monster.

Noel Carroll argues that the horror genre (what Carroll calls "Art-Horror") is intimately related to the emotional response of the audience who is engaging with the genre. For Carroll, horror must elicit both fear and disgust.[5] First and foremost the monster must frighten the audience. We see this in monsters with their long, sharp claws and snarling teeth-filled mouths. But Carroll also states that monsters must disgust the audience. Carroll refers to the effect of Dracula's warm breath on the back of Jonathan Harker's neck that made him cringe and the smell caused his stomach to turn. Carroll is also responsible for naming the "complex-discovery

[3] Wood, *On the Horror Film*, 77.
[4] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.
[5] Carroll*, The Philosophy of Horror*, 8.

plot." This plot structure consists of four parts: the onset, discovery, confirmation, and confrontation.[6] The onset usually occurs in the opening scenes of the movie where the monster is revealed to the audience. This often occurs with the monster dispatching an unnamed character. The point of the onset is to reveal to the audience, even before the cast, that there is a monster present and the characters are not safe. The discovery occurs when a main character discovers the existence of the monster even if the character is not initially believed. The confirmation occurs when other characters encounter the monster and now there is no doubt of the monster's existence. Finally, the "complex-discovery plot" ends with confrontation. This appears in the form of a final showdown between the cast and the monster. The monster is usually vanquished and defeated only to be brought back for the sequel.

2 Samuel 13 fits the complex-discovery plot. The onset begins in the opening verses of the chapter where the audience is told of Amnon and Jonadab's intent and plan. David, Tamar, and Absalom are left in the dark. Tamar is the first to discover Amnon's monstrosity when Amnon seizes her and rapes her. Confirmation occurs after Amnon kicks Tamar out of his house. She screams and tears her clothes. Absalom asks if Amnon had raped her and David hears of Amnon's crime. The confrontation finally occurs when Absalom orders his servants to murder Amnon. Reading 2 Samuel 13 through this plot structure centers the monster's hiddenness among the people. Monsters are creatures of shadows hiding from being discovered and outed. So, what then when the monsters that scare a culture are hiding in the shadows of the kingdom's palace?

Monsters are "meaning machines." Monsters are a reflection of a culture's own anxieties and identities. Cohen writes, "The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an

[6] Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 99.

embodiment of a certain cultural moment — of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, decisiveness, anxiety, and fantasy, giving them life and an uncanny independence."[7] For Cohen, monsters are as much a part of our own cultural identity even as we try to reject them. Monsters represent what we spit out and declare abject.

> Monsters are our children. They can be pushed to the farthest margins of geography and discourse, hidden away at the edges of the world and in the forbidden recesses of our mind, but they always return. And when they come back, they bring not just a fuller knowledge of our place in history and the history of knowing our place, but they bear self-knowledge, human knowledge-and a discourse more sacred as it arises from the Outside. These monsters ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place. They ask us to re-evaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance toward its expression. They ask us why we have created them.[8]

Discovering our culture's monsters is a way of discovering the skeletons in our culture's closet. The monsters of the gothic were foreigners, homosexuals, and women. So, what do we say when the monster haunting our culture is a prince and the one ignoring the danger at hand is the King for whom the entire royal house is named?

2 Samuel 13 has often been looked at for how the text works within the larger context of the Davidic narrative. It is clearly the next step after Nathan's prophecy in 12:10. The sword has come for the House of David after his taking of Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah. Yet the story sits at the beginning of what is known as the Succession Narrative. Amnon is poised to become king before Absalom has him killed. Further, Absalom will enact his own rebellion against the throne in the following chapters. A political reading of 2 Samuel 13 clearly notes that the two brothers are fighting over the throne. Yet this type of reading erases the vast importance of Tamar to this narrative. Tamar is the central figure of this passage.

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[7] Cohen, *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)*, 38.
[8] Cohen, *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)*, 52.

The first 11 verses describe a lovestruck Amnon who cannot figure out what to do with his lust for Tamar. Jonadab, his cousin, comes up with a scheme to get Tamar alone in his house. The audience is made aware of Jonadab and Amnon's plan and thus feels the tension of the scene as Amnon asks David to send Tamar to his house and make cakes because he is sick. David fails to see his son's ulterior motive and sends his daughter into the beast's lair with good intentions.

The following scene plays out through the eyes of the monster in a similar manner to slasher films. Just as we see young Michael Myers slash a knife at his older sister in *Halloween* (1977)[9] from Michael's perspective, or the perspective of a masked killer stalking camp counselors in 1980's *Friday the 13th*.[10] Sternberg suggests that point-of-view creates a connection between the text and the perceived reality of the reader.[11] Even though reading is not a visual medium; the images that are created in our mind reflect the perspective of the texts. In this case, our point of view is through Amnon's lust filled eyes.

Horror is no stranger to the sexualization of woman and this scene is full of the male gaze. The audience views Tamar making the cakes through Amnon's eyes. The phase "in Amnon's eyes" is repeated repeatedly throughout the first section of the passage. We are meant to see Tamar grab the dough, roll the dough, form the dough into cakes, and make the bread all through Amnon's eyes. In 1960's *Psycho*, Norman Bates stares at Marion Crane undressing in the bathroom.[12] We are disgusted at Bates's voyeurism but then Alfred Hitchcock makes us complicit in the crime as we now see through Bates's perspective through the peephole. We are

[9] "Opening Scene," *Halloween.*
[10] *Friday the 13th.*
[11] Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 129.
[12] "Peephole Scene," *Psycho.*

both disgusted at Bates's act and then disgusted at ourselves for participating in the same male gaze.

Clayton disagrees with this point. Instead of connecting the audience with the killer, the I-Perspective is connecting the audience with the victim. "If the intention of horror is to instill fear, then in simplest terms — the terms Hollywood prefers to play with — shots such as these are meant to make us afraid. And what is scary about having control over a violent situation without digging into some heavy-duty psychoanalysis? I could argue that using an aggressor perspective is a far more complex way of creating empathy for a victim than by placing the viewer in the shoes of a victim."[13] While Clover and Creed are happy to engage with this psychoanalysis, Clayton does make a good point. The I-perspective is primarily used to disguise the identity of the killer until it is later revealed. Are we meant to identify with a killer whose identity we do not even know or the screaming victim begging for our help. The audience wants to scream "Tamar, do not go in there." But our screams fall on deaf ears, and we are left to watch in terror through Amnon's eyes.

Once Amnon has seized Tamar and taken her into his grasp, Tamar begins her plea to stop Amnon. In v. 12, she pleads, "No, my brother. Do not rape me for such a thing is not done in Israel. Do not do this monstrous thing." The phrase "For such a thing is not done in Israel" is similar to phrases found in the other two rape-and-revenge stories found in the Hebrew Bible. Genesis 34:7 reads, "because he had done a monstrous thing in Israel, lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing was not done." Judges 19:30 describes the public's reaction to the gang rape of the unnamed woman at Gibeah: "All who saw it said, 'Nothing like this has happened and we have never seen something like this since the days that the sons of Israel came

[13] Clayton, *See! Hear! Cut! Kill!*, 52.

from the land of Egypt to this day." The three phrases claim that the rapes of Dinah, the unnamed woman, and Tamar are not something that happens in Israel. An interesting statement since it has happened three times in the Biblical narrative. Yet it underlines the abject nature of the three rapes. These atrocities are outside the bounds of accepted behavior in Israel. The perpetrators are abject under Kristeva's understanding; they are monsters.

This is why I have translated נבלה in 2 Sam 13:12 and in Gen 34:7 as a "monstrous thing." The term is often connected with "fool, scoundrel, or even stupid."[14] These are not stupid men. They are men who saw something they wanted and took it regardless of the laws and customs of the culture. Tamar doubles down on her monstrous language in v. 13. She says that Amnon will be like one of the נבלים in Israel. The NRSV translates this as "one of the fools in Israel." But "fools" misses the monstrous nature that is at stake. Amnon is not a fool, he is a predator, a monster that was seen lurking in the shadows eyeing his prey in the previous verses.

Amnon does not care. Tamar's pleas fall on deaf ears. He rapes her. Then looking at what he has done he becomes overwhelmed with hatred and disgust at her. He throws her out as if she was abject to him. Tamar puts ashes on her head and tears her garment. She goes around crying out loud.

The image of the woman shrieking in horror is a long-lasting motif of horror. Clover argues that the victim damsel goes back to the very roots of horror. "The killer is with few exceptions recognizably human and distinctly male; his fury is unmistakably sexual in both roots and expression; his victims are mostly women, often sexually free and always young and beautiful… If the killer has over time been variously figured as shark, fog, gorilla, birds, and slime, the victim is eternally and prototypically the damsel."[15] Erwin takes the motif of the

[14] *HALOT*, "נבלה."
[15] Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 42.

screaming woman and argues that women scream in horror because the woman sees the horrors that have subjected women.[16] Tamar does not scream when she is raped but when she is kicked out of Amnon's house, left to a system that has no use for a raped woman. Her brother silences her and her father fails to punish her rapist.

It takes two years for Absalom to enact his plot to murder Amnon and avenge his sister's rape. He goes to his father and asks him to join him and his brothers at a sheep-shearing festival. David refuses the invitation but allows Amnon to go in his stead. At the festival, Absalom commands his servants to kill Amnon. We do not get to see the action in the text, but we do see the reactions of David, his servants, and his other sons. Absalom flees into exile and the passage ends with David longing for Absalom's return.

Absalom's murder of Amnon in retaliation to the rape of his sister places 2 Sam 13 into the rape-and-revenge motif that has been found throughout human literature spanning across genres. Rape-and-revenge stories depict a rape (almost always men raping women though not always)[17] and that rape being avenged either by the original victim or by the victim's loved one. This plot structure has been seen in movies such as *I Spit On Your Grave*, *The Virgin Spring*, *The Last House on the Left*, and *Ms. 45*. Barbara Creed has argued for a Feminist New Wave Cinema version of the Rape-and-Revenge motif that she calls "Rape-and-Revolt."[18] These films include movies such as *Promising Young Woman*, *Revenge*, and *The Nightingale*. I would argue that the 2017's *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* also fits Creed's rape-and-revolt structure. These movies all include a rape, but the victim or victim's loved ones do not just go after the rapists but also after the entire system that upholds rape culture.

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[16] Erwin, "When the Woman Screams," 9:08.
[17] 1972's *Deliverance* depicts males raping other males.
[18] Creed, *Return of the Monstrous-Feminine*, 51-67.

In 2 Samuel 13, we see Absalom murder Amnon as revenge, but he also begins to undermine his own father. Absalom blames David for his failure to punish Amnon. This is the start of Absalom's undermining of David and eventual revolt. Thus, 2 Samuel 13 is intimately tied to the Succession Narrative and to the political games that are being played. But it is not a small part of the narrative, for Absalom it is the driving force that leads to his attempt at the throne of Israel.

Reading 2 Samuel 13 through a horror lens emphasizes the societal fears of ancient Israel. These things are not done in Israel. Yet they are and they are done by the very people for whom they lead. An anti-king sentiment is no stranger to the Deuteronomistic literature. First Samuel 8 rings throughout Samuel-King. But it is perhaps too simplistic to conclude by saying 2 Samuel 13 is simply about kings being bad. The text critiques the entire system that upholds the rape culture that leaves Tamar as a victim in her brother's house. Schulte and Schneider comment in their article on the absence of YHWH in Biblical rape scenes.

> Therefore, the deity's absence in the biblical rape narratives condemns some element of the narrative itself. The deity's presence in the other violent crime besides rape makes categorically evident that the biblical authors view rape as a crime set apart, a unique type of violence that demands observable absence of the Israelite deity. Thus, in light of all of the evidence harnessed [in their article], a likely explanation of the deity's absence in rape scenes is a result of the lack of attention on the true victim in rape narratives in the Hebrew Bible: the woman.[19]

In Schulte and Schneider's understanding of rape scenes in the Hebrew Bible, it is not just the author who is critiquing the rape culture that protects rapists in ancient Israel but Israel's deity as well. YHWH is absent and silent in 2 Sam 13, but Tamar is not. The last we hear of Tamar is her scream. This is where the story ends for her: covered in ash, torn clothes, screaming while her brother tells her to be quiet.

[19] Schulte and Schneider, "The Absence of the Deity in Rape Scenes of the Hebrew Bible, 33.

Let us return to the words of Tamar in 2 Sam 13:12. “For such a thing is not done in Israel. Do not do this abject thing.” This story is about two things at once. It is both a fictional tale acting in part as proof for the Deuteronomist’s polemic against kingship but also as a sort of horror entertainment. Alfred Hitchcock wrote that his friend wished that his friend’s children would never experience the emotion of fear. Hitchcock lamented that this was unfair to the friend’s children. “Oh, what a dreadful prospect!... The boys will never be able to ride a roller coaster, or climb a mountain, or take a midnight stroll through a graveyard…there will be no speedboating for them.”[20] Hitchcock explains that his friend is a speedboat champion who, unknowingly, seeks fear every time they sit behind the wheel of a speedboat.

Humans often embrace the sensation of fear for entertainment. The horror director goes on to explain that this is exceptionally true at the movie box office. “For every person who seeks fear in the real or personal sense, millions seek it vicariously, in the theater and in the cinema. In darkened auditoriums they identify themselves with fictitious characters who are experiencing fear, and experience, themselves, the same fear sensations (the quickened pulse, the alternately dry and damp palms, etc.), but without paying the price.”[21] Hitchcock argues that there is a pleasure in experience the fear of terror and experiencing the horror in a safe space; a place where we know we do not actually suffer the consequences.

Hitchcock points to a cinematic image of a woman, bound and gagged, strapped to a board. A buzzsaw begins to run up the boards and threatened our damsel in distress. The sharpened blades of the buzzsaw draw ever closer to our damsel. We can image the swinging pendulum coming closer to our heroine’s torso because we know that the hero will stop the

[20] Alfred Hitchcock, “The Enjoyment of Fear,” in *The Horror Theory Reader*, ed. Jeffery Andrew Weinstock (University of Minnesota Press, 2025), 122.

[21] Hitchcock, “The Enjoyment of Fear,” 123.

dreadful machine in the nick of time. In some cases, the electricity will shut off at the exact final moment, revealing a hero to the rescue. In other films, the buzzsaw meets with the captive and blood fills the screen. Either way, the movie-goer finds themselves enjoying the anticipation of either outcome. Hitchcock argues that the movie-goer of his day knows that the price will never be paid. "The saw will never reach its intended target. The plot may, and indeed should, indicate that the heroine's rescue is totally impossible. But deep in the subconscious mind of the spectator is the certainty engendered by attendance at similar dramatic works, that the totally impossible will occur."[22] This is not true of the modern moviegoer. The heroine is often dispatched, and the main character is in as much danger as any other character to fill the screen.

We see heroines cut in half and princesses raped by their half-brothers. Yet there is still a sort of pleasure in the horror narrative. Mathias Clasen argues that "Horror can help us get better at negotiating real dangers in the real world…[they] offer insight into the mechanics of social interactions and psychological processes and give us valuable vicarious experiences with the terrifying."[23] So when we see a princess raped by her half-brother, we realize this is both a fictional narrative bringing pleasure through entertainment, it is also making a point about the broader social dangers of ancient Israel. A reality that may have plagued the fears of the fathers, brothers, mothers, uncles, aunts, etc. of ancient Israel.

If we are to accept that 2 Samuel 13 is a part of a larger Succession Narrative then we must ask why the brutal rape of Tamar at the hands of Amnon and the subsequent revenge by her brother Absalom exists in the narrative. This narrative certainly discredits Amnon and begins to discredit Absalom as viable heirs to David's throne. However, I think this story is going beyond trying to make way for Solomon's rule but instead is stating that the horrors of rape and murder

[22] Hitchcock, *The Enjoyment of Fear*, 123.
[23] Mathias Clasen, *Why Horror Seduces* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 60.

already plague the society of ancient Israel. If it can happen to a princess, then why can't it happen to me and my family? 2 Samuel 13 is a tale of horror warning that no one is safe from a society that accepts rape culture.

This dissertation is an attempt to continue to bring horror studies in conversation with the Hebrew Bible. It stands on the shoulders of Amy Kalmanofsky's *Terror All Around*, Brandon Grafius's works,[24] and other articles and SBL presentations that have recently appeared. While this dissertation is not the first work to apply horror studies to the Bible, it is the first to engage with 2 Samuel 13 and Tamar's story specifically as a rape-and-revenge story. I have previously published an article on Genesis 34 as a rape-and-revenge story, but this dissertation takes on that work and engages in more recent feminist literature on the genre.[25] Previous works have looked at 2 Samuel 13 as a one-off story while other scholars have viewed 2 Samuel 13 as a political drama setting up the Succession narrative. I believe that my dissertation bridges these two views together and demonstrates that the rape of Tamar is the underlying issue that sets off Absalom's rebellion. Thus, the entire Succession Narrative begins as a reflection of cultural fears and anxieties. The House of David is a House of Horrors.

I do believe there is a lot more ground that can be covered by applying horror studies to the Hebrew Bible. As I mentioned above, I have written a short article on Genesis 34, but I think more can be said about Genesis 34 and Rape-and-Revenge narratives. I also think some of the same questions can be asked in the examination of Judges 19. In that same vein, I think even more can be said when all three rape-and-revenge narratives are read intertextually. There is a

[24] See Grafius's *Reading Phinehas, Watching Slashers* and *Reading the Bible with Horror*, and, to a lesser extent, his popular level works *Lurking in the Shadows: Horror, Religion, and the Questions that Haunt Us* (Broadleaf Books, 2022) and *Scared by the Bible: The Roots of Horror in Scripture* (Morehouse Publishing, 2025).

[25] See Merritt, "The Monsters Within," 213-25.

plethora of scholarship written on inner-biblical exegesis and horror is no stranger to referencing other horror texts and films. I wonder if more can be gleaned from these three texts if we read them intertextually and with horror as a lens in the same instance.

Kalmanofsky has shown that the prophets use horror to make their points, and I think there is a lot more to be said besides just Jeremiah. Prophets such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, and the book of the Twelve all use gory imagery and terror-inducing warnings to elicit fear and disgust in their audience. I have previously presented at AAR on the ending of Job as Cosmic Horror and how it relates to the phrase "the fear of the LORD."[26] Much research can be written about cosmic horror and theophanies in the Bible.

I am particularly interested in the horror subgenre, folk horror, and how it relates to group identity and cultural memory. Folk Horror is a sub-genre of horror that connects the violent history of a land and explores how it haunts the people currently residing on that land. Folk Horror is the horror of a people group's identity. I think parts of the Pentateuch, and especially the book of Judges, could benefit from a folk horror lens. I found the book of Judges and how it connects the land with the people through tales of conquest and violence interesting as a place to apply folk horror methods. Texts like Judges 6, where Gideon contends against the local customs of Baal and Asherah, worship or Judges 8-11, where Jephthah commits human sacrifice, are examples of stories that might benefit from a folk horror lens. Judges 11 acts as a progenitor tale for a tradition where the young women of Israel go out in the wilderness in remembrance of Jephthah's daughter fits into the folk horror genre.[27]

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[26] See Leland Merritt, "When an Animal Looks Up at the Night Sky: Job 38-42 as Cosmic Horror," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, November 20, 2021.

[27] Judges 11:39-40.

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